The HAPPY FAILURE

Solita Solano

WILLIAM CHARVAT
American Fiction Collection

The Ohio State University Libraries

By Solita Solano

The Happy Failure
The Uncertain Feast

THE HAPPY FAILURE

BY

SOLITA SOLANO

AUTHOR OF "THE UNCERTAIN FEAST"

G. P. Putnam's Sons
New York & London
The Knickerbocker Press
1925

Copyright, 1925
by
Solita Solano

Made in the United States of America

For Wick

THE HAPPY FAILURE

THE HAPPY FAILURE

PART I

I

TIMOTHY stood in rigid ecstasy, his eyes on the ceiling. He heard a door open and close in the hall and his sister's voice calling, "Timothy" and, growing nearer, "Oh, Tim!"

He jumped and frowned. Damn, no. Can't talk to anybody. Have to think.

She was at the door now, still calling importantly. "Tim!"

"You can't come in," he said through his teeth.

"I've got to. Here's some things——"

He strode to the door and opened it. "What things?"

"Erna's. The plumbers haven't finished. She has to dress in your room. I'll go in with mother."

"Oh, all right."

May pushed by him in a flowered kimona, her fair short hair falling down her white forehead. Over her arm lay a dress of white and silver. She

laid it on the bed with silver shoes and stockings. "What's the matter, Timmy?"

He went toward the window and said laconically, "Father. I told him I'm not going back to college."

"Oh!" Her pale blue eyes rounded and rested on his face. "What—what—Oh, Timmy, don't stand there like a bump on a log. Can't you ever *talk?* What's happened?"

"Erna—she—" He began to blush. "She'll tell you."

"But what *is* it? What are you so red for?"

"Go away, May. Go away. I want a little privacy sometimes."

May pushed back her hair and moved nearer. "Tim. Lend me five dollars, will you?"

He shook his head slowly. Mustn't lend any more money now. I'll need every cent. Five dollars would buy flowers for Erna. "Can't. Sorry. Oh, go away."

She went out and slammed the door.

He walked to the bed and took up the white dress in his hands. Oh, Erna, Erna! He kissed the breast of the dress and smelled it with closed eyes. God, I love her. I love her. Can't wait to be older. Must be right away. Now's the time for love. No wonder father looked at me like that. The worm turned all the way round. I'll show him I can work for her. All my life to serve her. Work and grandfather's money will do it. Only two weeks now. My legal maturity on the thirtieth of Sep-

tember ends all tyranny. Won't wait through my heat years for father's damned judicial opinion of the right time for me. He knows the right time for himself and I'd like to tell him I saw him that day through the door kissing Mrs. Hunt. Oh! why didn't I kiss Erna when she said "Yes" so sweetly and held her face up? She always listens with her face held up like that and a little smile. Always smiling at me. Maybe laughing at my awkwardness. Wish I could manage like Sham and Frank, hugging and kissing the girls at the proms and talking about "necking" all the time while I pretended I didn't like it. They know how to impress girls with indifference. They say girls like at-their-ease men who walk away from them. Not like me. Erna must think I'm just hopeless. No wonder she always smiles. Waiting to see what I'll do. What I'd like to do——

He groaned and kissed the dress again, holding his breath over the kiss and pressing the chiffon to his mouth until his arms trembled and his lips hurt. She'll be coming in here. Must go out. Out on the dark lawn with the trees. Time to think there. Must think how to kiss her. She must want me to or she wouldn't have said "Yes" in that sweet little voice like a bird's. She's so holy, soft and sweet. Little bones, round, fit into my hand maybe. Nobody ever kissed her. She's waiting to see what it's like. Oh, what if I can't and she's waiting all the time for it? I must. I will.

He imprinted his nails on his palms, the dress falling, billowing to the bed. Oh, I will. I swear I will. He spread out the white folds and silver lace, arranging them in artificial lines, carefully, stiffly, then stood back to look. My God, no! As if she were crucified in it. He brought down the lace sleeves to the sides. No. Looks as if she were dead in it. Fold over the top part. Put top part on my pillow. Better that way. I'd like to lie down by it and pretend it's she by me. No time now. She'll be coming. Can't face her yet. See her at dinner with the others. Hope father doesn't gibe at me all through dinner. Perhaps I'd better stay out on the lawn and get something later in the kitchen from Hannah. I can say I'm sick.

First listening by the door, he opened it creakingly and hurried down the hall. Erna probably in mother's room with May. Wonder has she told anyone yet? Father's not been up with the news. He wouldn't want mother to see him in that rotten temper. Now that Erna and Sham are here he'll try to be constrained and polished. Like those gentlemen of the old school he's always talking about. Trying to be easy and slow about all he does, thinking of the next word. As if that made a gentleman of any school. No heart. No justice. No imagination. Is that a gentleman? "Now that you want to wreck your education." He thinks you get one at college. I bet you get a better one at a trade school. Glad he approves of Erna's father. Busi-

ness and politics. If he weren't in with the steel people father would find plenty to say against him. He'd probably put me on a cattle boat so I couldn't get my money the day I'm twenty-one. Said I can't keep a job except through his influence. I'll show him. Said I'm immature. Well, I'm not hard like him if that's what he means. Guess he wants me to be an old frozen egg like him.

His shoes tapped down the last steps of the stairs. From the library he heard the voices of his father and Sham who had come out on the six-twenty. Unwillingly passing the door, his glance slid in at their profiles. Sham's polite nose and his father's mouth, still angry.

"We always get a cool breeze here no matter how hot it is in town. I suppose the asphalt was melting in New York today."

Mr. Doan's well-fed voice, a little thinned from his inward anger, floated disagreeably into the hall and hung in the air to make an overtone for Sham's courteous bored assent. The appetite for asphalt, the rush of the elevated, the perfect services of his offices, spacious as a palace, had permeated Mr. Doan's tones. It was the voice of success speaking in the twentieth century. No other age could have produced quite that fattened quality of big business done in a big way with all small competitors squeaking, hungry for mercy, in their corners.

Above the profiles and over the desk hung a portrait of Timothy Bleeker Doan, founder of the Doan

Solid Hosiery Company in 1850 and solidly successful from its beginnings. Timothy glanced up at his grandfather's victorious face while his father spoke again.

"I wanted to talk to you about my son. Now Timothy has got a notion in his head that——"

Timothy went on to the door. You bet I've got a notion. So did grandfather. So did father. They did what they wanted to and I'm going to do the same. Grandfather, richly dead on the wall. Father half alive in his chair. Me, the third generation, with the bit in my teeth for the first time. Well, dead and alive, they can't stop me. I'll have that money from grandfather and can do as I choose. Father's face still bloated with temper. I hate his face. I wouldn't care though what he looked like if he were only decent to me. Why can't he see I'm not made to fit into his mold? Must get away from him and his solid stockings. Only two more weeks of grinding my teeth and fighting with him. Only fourteen more days. Then I'll be twenty-one and free for my notion, he called it. Well, I'll get a job far from stockings where he can't pick on me. What? Where? I don't know. He'll be too angry to use his influence for me. Make your bed and lie in it. That suits me. Maybe I'll earn only two thousand dollars a year at first. But I don't care. Erna won't care either. She's not like the others. Hope her mother doesn't rush back from Europe and try to stop it. It would

be just like father to cable and put her up to it. He'd do practically anything, no matter how dishonorable, to get his way and then justify himself with talk about my best interests. Like the Jesuits, Mr. Field said. Even Hannah can see what father is. She doesn't like him but won't admit it to me. Yesterday she went out in the garden when he came looking for me in the kitchen and pretended to be pulling up something for lunch. Funny mother doesn't notice what he is. Maybe if you've always known a person you remember them that way and don't see what they've changed into. I don't know. Old hypocrite standing up in church bellowing the hymns so everyone will see he knows the words.

He shut the door gently, in his eyes the black-coated figure of his father with his solemn Sunday mouth opening and closing in the suburban temple for good Christians across the street from Ricci's ice-cream parlor.

A hand touched his arm as he crossed the veranda in the darkness. He felt it, tremulous, brushing down the cloth of his light serge sleeve, stopping his heart.

"Who——"

"Tim. Did you?"

"Erna!"

"Tell me quick. I've been waiting."

"Yes. What?" he asked idiotically.

"Your father, of course."

He nodded into the darkness, feeling for her hand

and not finding it. "Everything's settled." His tone was solemn, celebrating struggle, a deed done for them together though still apart, consecrative, ending in victory, disaster and shaken nerves, freeing the knowledge that now he might kiss the reality of the symbolic chiffon and tearing metal lace.

She breathed warmly across his face in a sigh, "Oh!"

"And now—" He found her hand and took it in trembling fingers. "Oh, Erna, you know how I want—I said to myself just now upstairs——"

Her voice stopped his groping in a whirl of words for those he would be able to speak. "Well, what, Tim? What?"

"Ah!" Her curiosity sounded practical. He stopped. The important imminency of the kiss dropped away and left the reality of his poverty when action was demanded. "Well." Oh, God, why can't I? Put out your arms, you fool. She wants you to. Go on, put them out. *Put them out.* It'll be over in a minute. Go on, go on.

Erna moved and her hand trailed away from his fingers. "I must go up." Still she lingered near him. "You can tell me later."

"All right." He was too heavy to move. Tongue turned to lead. He stood in stonelike heaviness until the door flooded him with light and again he was hidden. Then he ran from the house and dropped down on the fresh dampness of dew. He spread his fingers on grass clipped tight as a rug. Pressing

his palms into the elastic earth he tried to send his shame down far below the layer of green now stained black by night. Erna, Erna. Why couldn't I do it? What does she think of me? She's laughing now, running up the stairs, waving her little talking hands and laughing at me.

He groaned and rolled over by the pool. It was black and seemed as round as a millstone in his mind though he could not see it. Over its dark weight the comfort of flowing trees stirred, sighing in obscurity, secret in their pendency. The upper window he was watching was still dark but over it the sky held three luminous bars left from the departed sun. A hot star appeared and began to tremble over the trees. He shivered. It ought to be easy in the dark. Why wasn't it? Next time I can. But never in the light. I hate eyes watching. I'm helpless under eyes. Hers always laughing at me. I'd like to touch her shoulders. Little round things. Soft. Her little fresh spring body.

A square of gold snapped out on the blackness above and his heart leaped up and began to strike him. It felt swollen and caged inside his ribs. He climbed to his feet. His throat grew hard and he breathed through an unyielding tube. Now she's undressing to dress again in the dress I kissed. Sometime I'll kiss her as I kissed her dress. Long and hard. Oh, I hope she doesn't open my closet. She'll see all those old pajamas and things. Should have locked the door. Oh, damn! why didn't I lock

it? Smelly old sweaters for her to see. No, she's by the window. Hard shadow of soft pink girl. Her mouth like a wet flower. I never dare to look enough except when she's busy buttering bread or cutting up something. When she spilt the honey this morning there was time to look. She knows I look at her. Mother said she was sentimental. I don't think so. She's just natural and loving—oh, wonderful. But mother thinks May is sentimental too. Huh. Hard as nails sometimes. But May's nice. Likes Erna best of all her friends. May can come visit us after we're married. Married to Erna. Married to Erna. She said "Yes." And I didn't even kiss her. She's probably thinking of it this minute and wondering. After dinner I must. I will. If I swear to myself I'll do it. I'll have to do it. All right, I swear. Before May starts the phonograph I'll do it. Now don't forget you swore. If you swear you have to.

"Tim! Oo, oo!" Sham was on the veranda, hooting into the darkness.

Timothy answered with reluctance. "What?"

Sham approached invisibly, whistling an annoying tune. "For Pete's sake, what are you doing out there?"

Timothy waited until he was near before he explained. "Just thinking."

"Huh! Can't you ever think in the house?" He lighted a cigarette and in the glowing circle between his hands Timothy saw him smiling from one corner

of his mouth. "Funny thing I was reading today. All of a sudden it went into Latin and I didn't know the words. I'll show you. Maybe you'll——"

Timothy moved away from him and with dislike in his voice said, "It's probably something dirty. That's why you want to know."

"What if it was? Say, it seems to me you're getting pretty— Say, what's the matter with you?"

Timothy's mouth opened, then closed. Futility. He stood in silence and darkness, in his eyes the amber square of light, behind it her young purity. A shadow passed across the light. Some day he would be behind a curtain with her. Forever and forever. The sod under his soles seemed to grow softer as if it meant presently to yield and receive him into it. He moved and stamped his foot. The earth was firm again and he thought how he would resist it for many years—until he was an old man, shrunk inside his skin.

Sham's cigarette flew through the air like a meteor, marking an arc to the pool. It struck lightly and sizzled out. Sham blew smoke with a whispering sound. "Your father says you want to quit college. What'll you do?"

"I don't know."

"That's a crazy idea, Tim. Why don't you finish? I think a fellow ought to. Say, can I have some of your stuff? That sofa—what's it worth, would you say?"

"I don't know. I'd give it to you, Sham, only

I've got to save up all the money I can for something."

"What?"

Timothy stared up at the window. The shadow was blurred this time. She must have crossed the room a long way from the window. Gone again. He drew his breath and smelled the odor of absorbed nicotine from Sham. Turning, he looked at the faint disk of his face, not quite seen, scarcely to be suspected now of warm solidity. "Sham. Do you think twenty-one or maybe twenty-two is too young to get married?"

Sham jeered coarsely into his face. "Naturally. Everyone knows that."

"Oh, I don't know, Sham. I read a doctor's book last year——"

Sham began to laugh. "You must be in love to talk like that. Well, that would be funny. And unfortunate too. Say, you don't know girls at all."

Timothy focused fiercely on the disk. "I don't care to know some of the ones *you* like."

"Oh, they're all the same. Do anything you want to with any of them if they like you well enough. But *you* don't know that."

Timothy said in an angry spurt, "Roger Wickersham, are you including my sister and—Erna?"

"Now what do you want to drag in your sister for? That's not fair in a general discussion, is it?"

"Well, Erna then."

"Oh, Erna's all right."

Timothy opened his mouth and gulped. Erna all right! Maybe Sham hadn't ever noticed how beautiful she was. He felt himself bursting with the need to describe her qualities. He drew enough breath for the panegyric. "Erna's a—she's a fine girl, Sham." Oh, damn. Why couldn't he ever say the words that rode, galloping, through his brain?

"Nice little kid. I liked her last Easter. I took her to a dance one night. I kissed her, too. If I hadn't had to go back to——"

"You—you didn't!"

"Sure I did. I like her."

"You're lying."

"Am I? All right, then."

"You—you——"

The padded tones of a gong struck the air faintly, descending in a broken scale of metallic touches. Mrs. Doan's voice, laughing leniently, came to them through the damp coolness.

"Where are you boys? Din-ner!"

"All right! Coming!" Sham bounded away. His feet made thuds padded by the grass, flying gladly to warm food in a friendly house.

Timothy twisted his shoulders inside his coat. He felt cold and bewildered. What makes Sham tell lies like that? Always saying he's kissed girls. It's not decent. He'll have to apologize or I'll knock his head off. He can't lie about my Erna. I'll defend you, my sweet pure little girl.

His eyes went upward to the window, gazing in

love and pain. As he looked, the light went out and he tried to see her through the darkness, her slenderness covered with white and moving in young sweetness down the hall toward the stairway, her face lifted as when she had said "Yes" and waited for the kiss he had not given.

II

Timothy's chair, empty and straight, waited like a stiff reproach in the festivity of lights and quick hungry voices. He drew it back with an apologetic mumble for his mother and glanced at Erna over the bowl of flowers. His eyes touched her bright head with a timid sense of possession, then hid their eager humility in a long study of his plate. She was wearing the dress. Upon her breast lay the passion of his kisses. The welling of his love pressed upon her heart secretly, strongly, through a veil of white.

"Well," said Mr. Doan. "You might manage to get here for your meals even if you have suddenly gone crazy." He set down his fork and, frowning, waited to be answered.

Timothy went on staring at his plate. With lips pressed together as if his thoughts were too deep to be penetrated by a voice, he received into his eyes the round and shining whiteness of a dinner plate.

No one spoke. The butler opened the door slowly and thrust his black head into the room. He breathed in through his teeth and backed out.

"I *wish* he wouldn't do that," said Mrs. Doan. "I'll have to speak to him again."

Mr. Doan was diverted from Timothy. He fingered his fork. "Those Japs are a stupid lot. I don't understand how they get their reputation for being so clever. You never see them in English houses."

"Oh, don't you?" Mrs. Doan said. "Why I thought——"

Her voice trailed out of Timothy's closing ears. He looked again at Erna. Her round little face, tanned from the long summer, seemed sweetly disappointed. The sadness of longing lay in her large violet eyes. It's because I didn't kiss her. Oh, but I wanted to! Her throat is beautiful, burned to gold. Shadows on it from the flowers. She's like a flower. Delicate and lovely. Fragile. Brown-throated and yellow-haired. I wish I could write her a poem to tell her. Like "Hark, ah the nightingale, the tawny-throated." What's the rest? Something about a shrine occult, withheld, untrod, whose lamps tremble continually. That's like her. She's my shrine. So far above me—above everything——

"Stop cracking your fingers, Timothy," said his mother. "Eat your dinner."

Her tone was reserved and hurt. He glanced at her quickly but she would not meet his look. All at once he knew why. He had not gone to her with his engagement. Filled with the courage of love, he had chosen the more difficult, the more practical interview, depending on the tradition of her sympathy. Afterward he had forgotten. He clasped

his hands together on his knees. Everyone at the table had a reproach for him tonight. May's five dollars. Erna's kiss——

Sham across the table by Erna gave a short laugh. "Tim acts to me as if he was in love," he said. "Maybe that's why he can't eat."

All the mouths stopped moving. Erna bent a modest pink face.

"That's a good one." Mr. Doan wiped his chin with an abrupt and vigorous gesture. He threw down his napkin. "Of course he's in love. That's what all the hell's about, Roger. Didn't I tell you why he wants to leave college?"

Timothy squirmed and grew scarlet under all the pointing eyes.

"No," said Sham in an incredulous voice. "I didn't know why he——"

"It's all puppy love foolishness," went on Mr. Doan, letting his anger flow over the dam. "Just ruination for him, pardon me, Erna. College is the honeymoon he ought to be thinking about. I didn't marry until I was nearly thirty."

Timothy gazed with fierce eyes at the row of buttons on his shirt. I hate him. I hate him. How can he talk like that before her? Glad to humiliate me. He's vulgar and brutish in his mind just as if he had no breeding at all. My own father and he has no feeling for me in the most important crisis of my life. Always like that to me since I can remember because he doesn't like my type of mind.

As if I liked his. Hypocrite, always asking me to call him Daddy like May so that people will think I'm pals with him. "Let's be just two boys together," he said that time. Glad I never did. What an insult to Erna calling our engagement puppy love. Poor little girl, she must be thinking I ought to stand up for us or something.

With twisted mouth he began. "Father, it's not right——"

Sham was leaning over and grinning at him. "Oho," he said. "So that's it, is it? You and Erna ——"

"Well, he hasn't seen fit to tell me yet," said Mrs. Doan. "His mother and you, Roger, his best friend. We're the last to hear of it."

"Congratulations and everything," said Sham.

Timothy looked him between the eyes and said coldly, "Thanks."

"By the way," said Sham. "What I said on the lawn tonight—you know—was only a story. I was just talking—sort of."

"I'll see you later about that," said Timothy in a hard voice.

Sham looked away. "All right," he muttered.

There was a silence of anger and resentment. In it Timothy had a confused sense of beating his way up from under a weight of brown water. There was light but no air to clear away the rushing in his head. He fought and filled his lungs, gulping. Then the surface again, forks beginning to rattle, eyes

leaving his face and idle hands. There were some polite questions about second helpings. He looked over at the sad little primrose face opposite and felt his heart grow fresh again, beating away in a spurt of hot love. She was strange with him at this familiar table. She was not like them or ever could be. She would never point at the mold his father held and ask him to pop into it, a perfect fit.

Erna's eyes met his across the flowers. They were shining, perhaps with tears. A shimmering blue, deep, like blue smoke with light behind it. Flecks of gold in the iris. She looked away and he pushed up his heavy uncombed hair. I'll soon be away, blended with her life forever. I'll have her to care for always. She trusts me. She loves me. She——

"Even at thirty when I considered the seriousness of marriage I stood appalled by its responsibilities," began Mr. Doan in a sermonizing voice. "Matrimony isn't what you think it, Timothy. It's no long dream of bliss, I can tell you." He raised his fork to his mouth and took in an impaled morsel, chewed it a moment and added thoughtfully, "No, indeed."

Timothy, recalled, set his teeth and looked at his father's jaws with a gaze that hated what it saw. Hypocrite again. Probably he was thinking how much it would cost. Worrying now for fear he'll have to help support me if I can't get along. As if I'd take one cent from him after I'm twenty-one.

"I daresay you'll listen to reason and go back to college." His father's tone, richer than ever from food he liked, was conciliatory now with a wish to show how reasonable he could be with the impetus of youth. "Finish there, come out with a degree and I'll have a nice position waiting for you in my office. You won't have anything to worry about, you and Erna. In the meantime I'll be looking about for a place near us where you can live suitably. Now," he pushed his chair back and spread out his hands, attempting a smile, "how's that strike you, children?"

Erna, listening with eager eyes and lips, took her attention from Mr. Doan and gave it to Timothy. She waited, eyes on his hungry dark face.

He moved impatiently. "Thank you, Father. I —I can't——"

"There, there. We'll discuss it later." Mr. Doan pushed aside the subject as if it were a course he disliked. He cleared his throat and drank some ginger ale. His glance fell on his daughter in fresh blue silk between him and Timothy. He reached for her wrist and held it up in his long puffy fingers. "About time you were putting a little fat on those bones. Look here. Hardly anything for the crows to pick."

Timothy, smoldering, saw the tender meeting of their flesh. May loves him and he loves her. I'm the only misfit here. Even mother's against me now, without hearing my side. Well, you bet

I'll know how to treat my sons if I have any. My sons.

His eyes opened in a vague and frightened look at Erna's childish face, then dropped in swift terror to the breast of her white dress. Life was approaching to touch him intimately at last and he shrank away from its realities into sparse collegiate fancies, disturbed but safe. Someone seemed to speak to him. He shook off the impression and stared on at the slender contours of white and silver. Tonight. I'll kiss her tonight. I swear. Tonight. Oh, Erna, tonight.

"Timothy."

He saw his mother's pale dark face. "Yes, mother?"

"Aren't you going to eat your dinner?"

His eyes, still vague, brooded on her face, asking forgiveness. For the first time he saw in her the alert, never-sleeping yearning of maternity, wounded now because her son's love had failed her. His mouth moved as he tried to smile. "I'm not hungry tonight."

Curious he had never thought about motherhood before. Mothers had seemed ready-made, not evolved from straight little delicate white girls. The opulence of women, then, began with what he and Erna would say to each other tonight. She would begin to grow under his first kiss. It was wonderful to think about such things when you understood them.

"Take Thad Hobart now," said his father in a loud voice. "There's a fine young man for you, whose father can be proud of him. He took to the business like a duck to water and must be making twenty-five thousand now. He's made of the right stuff."

"The girls don't like him," put in May. "His face is always red and he stutters, Daddy."

"They'll like him all right when he's making fifty thousand a year," said Mr. Doan. "He'll take his pick then, I can tell you. And all because he did what his father told him. He wasn't one of these half-baked dreamers like Timothy here, penniless but putting up his back against authority."

Timothy stiffened in his chair and spoke in a hot choked voice. "I'm not penniless. I'll have grandfather's money in two weeks."

"Your grandfather's money," said Mr. Doan in bitter imitation. "And what's that, I'd like to know? How far would the income from that take you little love birds when the coal and feed bills come in?"

Burning, flaming, his mind dizzy from anger, Timothy snapped his teeth together and drew them over each other, back and forth, until the grating in his head made a pivot for his control. His heart filled his chest with fast nervous thuds. "You—I ——"

"If you're crazy enough to think of spending your principal I may as well warn you now that I shan't allow it." He stopped to let his fork fall with

a clatter and fixed Timothy with prominent blue eyes. "Do you understand that?"

The butler began to remove the plates, breathing into the obstinate silence and making cautious darting movements with his coffee-colored hands. Mrs. Doan's plate was whisked off, Sham's next, Erna's

---

"Do you?" Spots of anger blotched Mr. Doan's face. A tremor jerked his eyelids. He set his hand on the table with a thump. The butler, arriving at his elbow, hissed and drew back.

"Now, Edward," said Mrs. Doan.

The butler's brown hand glided to Mr. Doan's plate and secured it. May began to giggle. She held her napkin up and exploded into it. A torrent of artificially curled hair fell over white unfolded linen.

"Well, what amuses you?" said her father. "Let us all in on it, May."

May gasped and dropped her napkin. "I just thought of the time you made Timmy save paper bags for the Fourth of July. Over two hundred, and he popped them and popped them and *popped* them——"

Mr. Doan's face faded, relaxing and dropping down into easier folds. Leaning toward May, he made a noise in his throat and began to settle back into his chair.

Erna looked over at Timothy. Her eyes were grave and puzzled. "Why did you want paper

bags?" She placed her tanned elbows on the table, stretching up her fingers behind her ears until the tips, slender and polished, were covered with beige-colored hair. "Why did you, Timothy?"

He felt the blood scorching his face as he looked back at her in dim-sighted misery. "I—I—" He gulped.

May answered for him. "He didn't want them. He wanted firecrackers. But daddy wouldn't——"

"Too careless," said Mr. Doan. "He would have set himself on fire and not even noticed it. I never trust a disorderly person with anything dangerous."

"Oh," said Erna. Her eyes caught all the lights in the room and sent them at Timothy in a look of assurance and sympathy. Then, hearing May's relapse into laughter, she glanced down and tightened the two little puffs of her lips. Timothy, watching, saw the struggle beneath the skin of muscles pulling and being repressed.

"—and popped them!" shrieked May. "Over two hundred——"

Erna yielded. She turned up her chin and her chiming laughter, nubile and unaffected, blended with May's and Sham's.

Mr. Doan looked about at the convulsed young faces and seemed pleased with himself. He folded his hands over his stomach and waited for his dessert.

Timothy, a tempest in his heart, hung his head and hated his father. Childhood the happiest time

of your life! I wouldn't live mine over for a million dollars. Pain and humiliation for twenty-one years. Just wait till my birthday. I'll show him something. He watched his father's eyes as they followed the platter of ice-cream around the table.

III

May turned on the phonograph in the living room. "Timmy, come here!"

Timothy hesitated in the doorway. "No. Erna and I—" He looked over his shoulder. Mr. Doan, his hand on Sham's arm, was going down the hall to the library.

"Now if Timothy would only look at things sensibly, Roger, we—" He waved Sham ahead of him through the door.

Timothy waited. Where was Erna? His heart was beating faster than it had ever beat before. His hands were cold and wet. He moved his fingers over the palms. You swore and you have to do it. Hurry up. Then tell Hannah. She'll understand. Wonderful feeling to be engaged. She thought so, too, only he died. She never saw anyone else. Just like me if Erna should die. I'd never, never love again. I'd just consecrate my life to remembering.

"Come on dance this one, Timmy."

"I don't feel like it yet."

The phonograph repeated the moan of a saxophone. The room was filled with blare and light. May kicked at the rugs and began to sing in a high canorous voice.

He went back to the dining room and looked in. His mother was still sitting in her place at the table and talking to Erna in a low voice. Their chairs were drawn together. Erna's face as she listened was turned up. Her eyes were round and serious. Mrs. Doan's hand went out to hers. Erna nodded and said "Yes" in her solemn voice of a child.

He went slowly back to the living room and leaned against the door, watching May deal out records from the large pile. Mr. Doan and Sham came out of the library smoking and stood behind Timothy. He frowned over their voices and pressed his shoulders hard to the wood.

"Sham!"

May stood waving her arms. Sham leaped forward and ran into them. They began to dance.

"Well, Timothy," said Mr. Doan, "shall we finish our little talk?" His eyebrows strained upwards and his mouth lifted in a half smile of effort and conciliation.

"I've got a sort of headache tonight," said Timothy. "Will tomorrow——?"

Mr. Doan's smile dropped back and his heavy eyebrows shifted their weight. He raised his cigarette between thumb and forefinger and placed it like

a cigar in a corner of his mouth. "Hum," he said impressively. Tall, important and displeased he walked slowly to the phonograph and lifted one record after another to read their names in intolerance and set them down.

Timothy stepped out of sight and went toward the library. Why doesn't she come, why doesn't she come? I hope mother's not trying to influence her. Probably father's put her up to something. I should have called her out. He took one of his father's cigarettes from the box on the desk and lighted it, standing in the glow of the lamp. The room seemed to ache with memories of his disciplines and defeats. His grandfather's portrait overhead had presided at these encounters and the painted face of the Puritan had always been set against the side of youth.

Timothy gazed up and blew smoke at the square of canvas. I don't like you but I'm grateful you died and left me that money. The only thing to do for me was to die. Thank you. That queer philosopher I read last year. He said that gratitude is nasty. Then why do people think it's decent to feel it? Anyway, I'm grateful for the money and because you aren't here. I never knew you and I wouldn't have liked you if I had. If you were alive it would only be another one to fight me. On father's side of might and common sense. Well, I'm not going to let him punish me for my instincts. I'll marry Erna if he puts the entire Inquisition on

me for it. Red in the face from temper when I said there wouldn't be any world if there weren't people with instincts like mine. He calls all my ideas half-baked college notions. Everything he doesn't like is half-baked—Socialists, Henry Ford, osteopathy, me. We all need cooking together. What did he send me there for if he didn't like what I was to learn? He knew I wanted to be a civil engineer—or even a farmer. Crops and animals better than people who act superior all the time. You can always be happy in the country. He calls this country to his friends in New York. A country gentleman, he thinks he is after business hours. Gardens and an artificial swimming pool on Long Island. And a son classically trained for business. How can a degree get you a business career? Imagine walking into an office and saying, "I want a job in your insurance company. I know an Apulian fusion when I see one, also a telamon, and as for dynes and megas, I play with 'em like marbles. And Andromache was a woman of strong B.C. character. I'm stuffed with the lore of the ancients so I ought to sell a lot of insurance." Business! Enough slaves to money now. Like Thad. After the office he reads three hours' worth of theories on banking and political economy so he can get ahead of the other men. Fearing inferiority. Like me. I always feel inferior. In America a man is inferior unless he makes a lot of money. Money makes him superior and a good talker about his business success. Otherwise

he stammers and blushes like me. Funny Hannah is the only one I can talk to. The night I told her about the Greek and Trojan war. I wish I could talk to Erna like that. But I'm always afraid of saying something ridiculous. Thinking hard about saying things right makes me say them wrong. Can't say or do anything right. Can't even kiss a girl in the dark when she's waiting for it. Erna waiting for me now. My test. God, anybody'd think I didn't want to the way I drive myself to it. Out on the veranda and before I have time to torture myself I'll throw my arms around her. Funny it should be hard to express your natural instincts. All day and night you think how wonderful a kiss would be and then when you're in front of it you can't do it.

"Timothy!"

He went to the door. "Here, mother."

She stood in the hall, a silk shawl wrapping her narrow shoulders. "Come in with the others, dear."

He saw he was forgiven. He passed his arm through hers and looked into the living room. Sham was dancing with Erna. His arm made a dark bar about the white of her dress and his mouth was stretched in a laugh and bent toward her upturned face with its constant wondering eyes. His thoughts slipped from his mother and began twisting about in his head. How could he get her away?

"There's the picture you copied for me." Mrs. Doan nodded at the wall. "I thought it was a shame

to keep it in my room where no one ever saw it."

He turned. A water color covered with glass hung over his head and he saw the figures he had forgotten for two years. Blake's Adam and Eve. The Christian god, bearded like a Hebrew patriarch. Adam with blue curls and four sheep kissing his foot under a cloud. A rock with a face like Pan's. He had not known Erna the summer he had discovered Blake and the mystic poets and the Italian girl with red hair who had sketched plaster casts at the Metropolitan every morning. He gazed at the wall and remembered himself as he had been then, lanky and timid, walking along under enormous casts, far whiter than marble. Temples and centaurs, arrested figures in friezes, proud muscled horses—and he searching fearfully among blind mythological faces for one alive and decorated with a blaze of hair which he would salute, linger before and walk away from against his will. He had never dared to kiss her either, or indeed even touch her arm. He remembered without interest how he had wanted to the day they had walked in the park under a hot inciting sun. A childish impulse. Not like now. The memory of the colossal figures of mythology that passed through his mind gave for a moment a background of dignity and grandeur to little Erna. She seemed besides the cause and reason for his existence, the source, the fountain, the fruitful field, the mother of all life and love, Demeter in bud for him.

He looked into the room at the lightness of her moving body and his eyes clung to and adored the goddess he saw in a twentieth century girl of a country whose women were free rather than fruitful. As he watched, Sham bent lower. His cheek brushed Erna's hair. He spoke into her ear. Erna's wide eyes closed slightly in an acknowledgment of sex and no fear of it. Timothy saw that all at once she looked less innocent. Her hand like a little white leaf fluttered up on Sham's shoulder.

Timothy felt hollow and sick. He drew away from his mother and went down the hall. The door seemed far away and the handle when he took it into his palm was as unfamiliar as if he had never turned it before. It's true about last Easter. Sham kissed her. Well, he knows how. But he oughtn't to have told me. The rotten part was telling. Damn him, why did he tell me?

His body felt numb and he shivered. He breathed the dark air that rose wet from the grass and smelled the potency of the earth he loved—earth so rich that worms must be touching each other's slimy lengths as they burrowed in plenty. The rich earth of the world. It made life cheap. Nothing so cheap as life, swarming, devouring itself and decaying in the belly of some other form—a disgusting law of transfer. And he was as cheaply unimportant as any worm that was now feeling his weight. Cheap, insignificant and a fool besides. He had been going

to give a girl her first kiss, the heroic scene already laid out in his mind, the longed-for lover offering his handsome person to the inexperienced maiden of his heart. And while he was undertaking his timid caress she would have been smiling over his shoulder, seeing on the wall behind him his shadow, a grotesque outline with a swollen head and the legs of a pigmy.

He leaned against a tree, a sapling, young and green like himself. The pain that swelled his heart bewildered him with its difference from any pain he had ever felt before. The walls of his flattened stomach ground together in an area of nausea. His entrails moved in revolt, snakes stirring in their secret nest. "Damn him," he said aloud. "Damn him." His body grew rigid and warm. A prehensile anger, hot and enthusiastic, mounted to his head. "I'll settle him!" A pink mist seemed to cover the blackness of the night. Through it he began to move slowly toward the house, catching deep breaths of the reddish night into his lungs. He felt stronger now, elated, even happier. His hard brown fingers were doubled into fists. He walked forward on the balls of his feet.

As he flung open the door he heard music and voices, hearing them as if he had not heard them before. The saxophones, breaking time in a wailing complaint, seemed to rise a tone higher as in a warning. He marked every note of music, every

slow flow of wordless voices, standing in the open door with a strained avenging face. Then his throat swelled and from it came his voice, hard and hot.

"Sham!"

Only the music came out to him now. Voices were withheld.

"Sham!"

May appeared, her hands falling by the sides of her turquoise dress. "What's the matter, Timmy?" Seeing him, she drew up a hand to her throat. *"Timmy!"*

Then Sham's face, lazy, smiling, questioned him over her shoulder. "Want me, Tim?"

"Yes. Come out here. Quick."

"What for?"

"Never you mind what for. Come on."

"Oh. All right."

Timothy waited, panting, watching the laziness pass from Sham's face. It looked wary now and prepared as it moved away from its secure background of May's blue dress and the blurred faces that had appeared in the doorway like a sudden pale festooning of the dark wood. A patch of white, too. Erna. His teeth closed and his hand shot out to Sham's collar.

"Hey, wait a minute," Sham said. "What's——"

Timothy dragged him through the door and closed it. "Now come on, you—you—" Every violent and vicious word he had ever heard rushed into his

thoughts as he scuffled Sham down the steps to the grass. He tried to spit them all out into the blackness as they streamed into his mouth. But his tongue was inhibited. It pronounced "You—you —" again and balked the rest. Then he found he had no more effort to give to words. A blow from Sham, shorter and sturdier, caught him across the face. He stumbled and fell full length upon the grass.

For a moment he lay there, helpless with pain. Sham's feet moved near him, searching. He heard quick breathing above him. He commanded his strength and sent away the pain from his head. He sprang up into the darkness and at his first step touched Sham's foot. He pulled back his arm and sent it forward with a grunting sound. It caught something smooth and bony that fell away from the back of his hand.

"Ow," said Sham. "You damn little ass——"

Timothy moved quickly and felt something swift pass his cheek. He struck again. Again his fist butted against bone. A sensation of triumph passed through him. Then his chin was smashed back with a force that left him hanging unbalanced in empty obscurity, his arms waving for direction and support, his legs running backward, panicky uncertain deserters. As he stopped them and balanced forward once more, he heard Sham's voice.

"Say, Tim, are you cuckoo? How can I fight you when I'm not mad about anything?"

Timothy drove at the voice. "I'll teach you—Erna—" He missed flesh but grazed cloth and with his left hand sent another blow.

"Cripes," said Sham. "Quit a minute, will you? My nose is bleedin'."

"Had enough?" Timothy demanded of the darkness.

"Enough?" Sham's voice was smothered. "Say, I didn't want any of it. I tell you I can't fight when I don't feel like it. So damn silly. Give us your handkerchief, will you?"

"Do you apologize?"

The front door opened and a bar of light was flung across the lawn. Mrs. Doan's voice, febrile and tense, called to them. "Boys! Boys! Timothy!"

"Oh, gosh, there's your mother."

Timothy sank his fingers into Sham's arm. "Apologize!"

"Sure. But don't act so crazy. Say, I'm not in love with Erna. You're the one she likes."

"Timothy!"

Sham lifted his voice as he walked into the strip of lemon light. "He's here, Mrs. Doan. It's all right."

Timothy watched him go up the steps before he turned and walked along the flower beds toward the back of the house. He pushed back his hair and tugged at his tie. He began to hum, looking up at the kitchen windows and rubbing the knuckles of his right hand. He laughed quietly. Then he ran

toward the steps and went leaping up them, three to a bound. That was settled. The kiss could wait now. But the striving of his stomach was an immediate concern.

IV

Hannah was drinking a saucer of coffee. She looked up at Timothy over the edge of white china. Her eyes, hazel and shrewd, began to vibrate with light. He shut the door and came to sit near her, settling his back into the round spokes of a chair.

She drank the last of the coffee and set down the saucer. "Well," she said with a sniff of affection, "I might have known you'd come nosing around."

"Why?" He stretched out his legs comfortably and felt in his pocket for his cigarette case.

"Oh, a little bird told me you didn't eat your dinner."

"What bird? That Japanese finch?"

Hannah's mouth opened and her eyes became slits in two wrinkled purses of flesh. She laughed without noise, bending forward and finally pressing her hand to her side.

Timothy, smiling and relaxed, sent his gaze across the kitchen to a table near the window. Two plates waited there covered with a napkin. He put his cigarette back into the case and dropped it into his pocket. "I suppose you didn't save me anything?"

"Why should I be saving you anything? Don't

your fancy waiter give you your dinner at the table with the rest?"

"All right. Good night, then." He sprang up and went quickly to the door.

"It's not so good cold as it is hot," she said at his back. "But that's the way you'll have to eat it. I can't be warming up the vittles at half-past ten at night and me on my feet all day."

He turned and looked at her with sombre eyes. "I know. But you won't have me to bother you very much longer."

She stared at him, her middle-aged eyes settling back into her head. "Is that so now? College again soon, isn't it?"

He shook his head. "Not much. It's—" He paused and came close to the table. "I'm going to get married." His face took on an eager look, a hunger for her excitement and approval.

Her eyes remained quiet and dull, lying stiff in their sockets, watchfully. "Go on with you. You are not."

"It's true, Hannah. This afternoon——"

"That little blond fluffy doll?"

"Yes. Erna Swift. Oh, Hannah, isn't she pretty! She's the prettiest girl I ever saw. Father's furious. You know how he is with me about everything. Isn't it wonderful, Hannah? I'm going to work, of course. I have to make a lot of money for her."

"I suppose you will." She looked at him with a

gentle simian face, then got up and brought the covered plates to the table. "Better eat your dinner before it's bed time."

He seized a knife and fork and began to eat, talking between bites, frowning as he swallowed. "I knew you'd be glad. And say, do you know what I thought of? Why couldn't you come with us after we're married?"

Hannah went back to her chair, folding her arms across her stomach. "What did the boss say?"

"I don't care what he said. I'll be twenty-one in two weeks and—" he waved his fork—"legally free."

"I guess he can't stop you. How old is she?"

"Nineteen."

"What did her folks say?"

"They don't know yet. They're in Italy. But it'll be all right, I guess. And if it isn't— If they object—" He swung his fork down to his plate. *"Well——"*

Eating softly, he watched her face as it came slowly to life about the eyes. Affection and pride streamed across to him from beneath the short rough eyebrows. All at once he seemed to change places with her and saw himself from her side of the table, a tall thin youth with a face that was excited and pale, the forehead untidy with black hair, the eyes thirsty, unhappy, dark. With suspended fork he stared at this sudden image of himself, thinking that to a loving old woman whose life

had been pressed of frenzies and fertility like a grape of juice and seeds, he must seem a fervent and romantic figure—the misunderstood son of the household, about to brave his father's rages for the girl he loved.

He drew his breath with a sensation of swelling pleasure. The kindled eyes were shining upon him in admiration and awe, waiting. The faded pink lips, flat and narrow over porcelain teeth, drew away from each other in anticipation. They trembled and moved.

"Well—what would you do then?"

He flung back the hanging lock of hair from his forehead and flushed with heroic blood. "Well, I guess I'd—I'd run away with her, Hannah. We'd just have to elope, I guess."

"Oh! Would you do that now? Would you dast to do that?"

He gazed back at her, breathless. "Yes. Yes, I would. Oh, Hannah, if you only knew what a—what—what a wonderful girl she is!"

Hannah sniffed and smiled. "All I know about her is seeing her come through here with Miss May in a bee-line for the ice-box mornings. She eats plenty—like she was still growing."

Still lighted, his eyes stared past Hannah. Erna in her white and silver dress stepping into his little car in the moonlight. He threw a coat over her shoulders to protect her soft white flesh. She turned to him and they kissed over the wheel. "You're

sure they won't catch us, Timmy, and bring us back?" He laughed into the silver light and kissed her again. "By the time they miss us you'll be Mrs.—Timothy—Doan!"

Hannah unfolded her arms from her stomach. "I suppose the next thing you'll be after is a piece of that cake I made yesterday. Raspberry icing ——"

"No, I had enough, I guess." He stood up from his chair, breathing fast and fixing his eyes on the ceiling. "Have you ever thought of how—well, exciting—life is? And how important every little thing may turn out to be just by thinking of it? You sit down some place to think about something, you know, Hannah, and just that one thought may change your whole life."

Hannah looked up at him, her eyes growing dull. "I guess you enjoy life when you're young. Afterwards——"

He plunged his hands into his pockets. "You bet. That's what I'm going to do. I'm going to live each year of my life as if it were the last. For me this next year—this next year—" He began to whistle through his teeth. He pulled his hands from his pockets and buttoned up his coat with an important and busy air. "Well, I must run along now. She's—she's waiting for me."

"Is she now?" Hannah's thick eyebrows moved up and down with simian facility.

"We have so many things to discuss—" Under

her homage he had expanded in ease and projects. He felt warm and anointed, strong and swift under attack, confident and happy in his youth.

"She'll want to be asking where you'll be taking her after," Hannah said.

Timothy guessed her own curiosity and waved his hand. "It won't matter to her as long as she's with me." He took a cigarette and lighted it. His hand trembled and his blood flung itself through his veins. He gave Hannah a friendly patronizing nod. "Thank you for saving my dinner. It was—Well, good night, Hannah."

"Good night yourself." She watched him pass buoyantly through the door and her lifted eyebrows settled down gently into their resting places.

V

He walked to the living room with steady steps and head lifted up, a summons for Erna ready on his lips and a hand that was balanced for the gesture he had planned. "Come, Erna. Come, dear. We'll walk on the veranda." But she wasn't there. Only Sham and May sat in the padded chairs. They looked up as he stopped in the door.

"Hi, there!" said Sham. "Come on in, Jack Dempsey."

May smiled at him with respect. "Where have you been? We've been calling our heads off all over the lawn."

He ignored her, planting his feet apart and looking at Sham with studied indifference. Sham's nose was swollen and red, he noticed. "Where's Erna?"

"Upstairs," said May.

"Oh." His face drooped from eager assurance into blankness. "Where's mother?"

"Upstairs, too," said May. "And father's in the library and Manushi's at the movies and God's in his heaven——"

"Don't be so silly," Timothy said. He gave her a glance of displeasure and turned away.

"Well, pip-ip, Firpo," called Sham.

Timothy went gently up the stairs. Silly children, playing with substitutes until it was time for living. What did they know about anything important or serious? They were giggling behind him as if they had said something witty. But his contempt for them felt weak, unsustained by the elation, now faded, he had brought from the kitchen. Erna had not waited for him. She had gone to bed. Why? It wasn't eleven o'clock and she must have known that tonight was one of the most vital nights of their lives. Why hadn't she waited? Was it because of something his mother had said to her while their heads had been drawn together after dinner?

He passed along the upper hall and saw that her door was ajar upon darkness. She was not in her room, then. He stood looking at the strip of black that split the whiteness of the wood and remembered something he had once read in a novel. Women were not to be depended upon. Their caprices were historical and inexplicable. No man could ever understand a woman. They didn't understand each other. They didn't understand themselves. Moods and whims guided and governed them. That was why they delighted in the strong will of a man. A man was their rudder and their captain. He drew his straight black eyebrows together. It was all puzzling and illogical. He didn't believe any of it.

He thought of his systematic mother. And even May, direct and practical. No, a mood, unless it was a mood of anger for his ineffectiveness, wouldn't explain Erna's absence. She wasn't afraid of him. Hadn't she held up her face to be kissed before turning away from him with tender and disappointed eyes?

He pressed his arms to his sides and held his breath while a spasm of pain and self-contempt shook his heart. He had thrown away his chance with her. She was through with him. All he had withheld from her of passion and worship had descended upon the folds of a dumb white dress.

With head bent and teeth set into his lip, he went quickly to his room and flung open the door. The lights were on. He blinked into them and stared. Erna sat in a long white curve on his most comfortable chair by the reading lamp. She looked up from a book with startled eyes and a sweet drooping mouth, relaxed from fatigue and waiting.

"Hello," she said in a small fluty voice.

"Erna—you—I've been—" Her steady eyes rested on him, smokily opaque. Their cool calmness quenched his hot words. "What are you reading?"

She pushed the book to the floor and stood up. "'Sartor Resartus.' It's stupid." She placed the tips of her fingers on the arm of the chair and gazed at him with an impatience that was warm and wistful.

Closing the door, he looked at her dizzily.

"Erna." He saw the lithe reed-like body straighten under his eyes, wrapped in white, uncurved. The infantile mouth, moist and pink, opened like a flower in a faint soft smile. The smoke in her eyes darkened to gray. Her pale orange hair seemed like a halo that caught radiance from his desire.

His feet staggered toward her, set by his will. I swore and I will. Before she knows—so beautiful—"Erna, I love—" He put his artless arms out straight beyond her sides and stiffly bent his head. His mouth kissed hers, purely and briefly. The touch flooded him with light and heat. A spinning began in his head and shot down to his heart. In the chaos he could not order he heard her voice and felt her fingers slipping up on his shoulder. He asked, "What? What did you say?" His lips felt immobile, drugged.

"I said why are you afraid of me? I'm not of you."

He pressed his arms slightly against her sides. They were still unbent for an embrace and he dared not move them either toward her or away. Her face still lingered beneath his and its animated delicacy filled him with terror. This tender living flesh could not be crushed and rubbed and breathed upon —maltreated like a dead white dress—worried like a bone in a dog's jaws. In its pastel purity, defenceless and fragile, it seemed lifted to receive the kiss of a moth in moonlight in a meeting of things fragile and beautiful.

Then like a wind through his mind that swept it free of its daze came the thought of Sham. "Ah," he said. His arms fell and he stepped away from the drooping head. "Erna. You know I fought with Sham tonight. About you. He said that last spring he—well, he said—he *kissed* you." As he pronounced the word "kiss" he felt an unbearable heat spread over his body and face and into his eyes that stared at her in misery.

"Did he?" She closed her eyes and a puzzled pucker made a shadow between them. She opened them again, wide and bewildered.

"Why, Erna! Don't you *know* if he did?"

"Oh, yes, perhaps he did. He took me to a dance —on the steps—but why did you fight about that, Timmy? I never liked him."

He studied her a moment in unhappy persistence. "Then why did you kiss him?"

"I didn't. He kissed me—here."

"I don't understand." Her cheek. Well, that wasn't so bad. But why—if she didn't——

"Timmy—didn't you ever kiss a girl?"

"No."

"Why didn't you?—You could have—you're so good-looking."

He didn't answer.

"Were you afraid?"

He nodded, pale now and relieved of his pain. "I suppose so."

"You're funny. You're afraid of me, too, aren't you?"

"Terribly."

"Don't be. Timmy—I love you. I love you to kiss me. Kiss me, Timmy." She sent up her hands and the two white flashes passed behind his head.

He closed his arms at last about her body. It felt like the young tree on the lawn transformed into flesh—hard, round, strong with sap, pressing against him with a desire to grow and force passionately and instinctively its roots far into fertility. It was one with the bud and yield of the soil he loved to watch when spring persisted on the fields and flats of Long Island. Flesh still nourished by the earth that had produced its beginnings, flesh that tried to renounce its moldy mother, flesh that kept itself from contact with the dark stains of its origin.

"Timmy."

He heard her voice, smothered in his shoulder, sweet and plaintive. With dazed and hungry eyes he looked down at the small cropped head, thrilling slowly to his realization. Her face moved up, then, to meet his mouth and again he kissed her with cautious passion and the reverence of youth.

VI

Mrs. Doan was singing "Ave Maria" and playing the accompaniment with sympathetic straying fingers. Her voice strayed, too, the low notes seeking the corners of the room and the high notes, stronger-winged, flying through the door into the hall. Timothy listened, pressing Erna's hands as they sat close together on a bench, breathing in long nervous intakes of breath, migrations of sighs that went out from their hearts.

The music dropped away and while silence settled on the house, Erna turned her head and rested her eyes on his staring face. Her eyes were soft, large with trouble, astonished that trouble could approach her closely, who all her life had never felt its imminence. While her gaze appealed to him, a motor whirred along the roadway. They moved together and looked at the door.

"There he is."

They listened, eyes and ears strained beyond the walls. The whirring passed, grew fainter, stopped. "No. The kitchen."

Timothy's tense hand relaxed its clasp on Erna's as he turned his body to face hers. "We may be wrong. Something else may have happened."

"But what, Timmy? You don't know how mother is. She never wants to leave until the last minute. The only time she ever came back ahead of time was when grandmother died—father's mother. And that was only for appearances. Mother cares a lot for appearances."

"I wish I dared ask him. Maybe I will tonight, Erna. I guess tonight everything will come out. It will be terrible tonight. But I won't let him down me. I'll just think of you——"

His hand closed on hers and he held his breath, his eyes stretched wide to see the terrorizing scene in which he, an inexperienced protagonist, would be flayed to victory on the familiar battleground among books.

"Oh, I'll stay upstairs, Timmy, till it's over. On the bed with my head under a pillow."

"He'll be as bad as he can think of—raving and bursting through his skin. But he can't keep the money away from me. I found that out at the lawyer's. The worst he can do is to get your mother on his side. If he's sent for her——"

"Mother will be awful, too. She'll never let me, Timmy. I know she'll never let me. Never."

"She doesn't have to. You're nineteen. And if you're sure—sure——"

She leaned to him and he felt her breath on his eyes in sweet assurance. "Of course I'm sure."

"Can you stand going without—things? Last night I was thinking about it. I almost put it down

but I couldn't make it rhyme. It was about your not having any jewels but your eyes after we were married."

She looked puzzled before she smiled. "I don't think I have very pretty eyes." Her little fluty voice rose and fell in pleased cadences.

"Oh, you have, Erna, you have! When I first met you I thought——"

"There's another car."

He shivered and his eyes settled back. "You'll stick, Erna?"

"Yes."

"No matter what we may have to do?"

"Yes."

"Even if—we have to run away?"

"Oh! How could we? It would be exciting, but —No wedding, Timmy?"

"We couldn't. No time."

"Oh!"

The motor was loud now outside the door, panting and grinding.

Timothy whispered. "A license only takes a few days to get. Then nobody could stop us. We'd be married."

Erna's eyes fixed themselves in thought, shutting out his face from their focus. Her cheeks were flushed and her lips trembled apart, as she braided her fingers in her lap. "Oh, dear! I'd love a nice wedding."

The door burst open and Mr. Doan thrust him-

self into the hall with heavy purposeful steps. He caught off his hat and stopped with grim eyes and a mouth crushed upon itself.

"Ah, there you are. Just the fellow I wanted to see."

Timothy felt a heaviness enter into his body and a chill into his blood. The sight of his father's formidable face stole from him all the resolution his birthday had brought. He felt it escaping from his mind as if a valve had been opened to relieve an unaccustomed accumulation of years. One year passed off, two years, five years. Again he was a school boy, intimidated from a planned revolt even before he stood among literary walls under the portrait of his hardy grandfather. Then shame for his timidity gathered in him and, getting to his feet, he tried to speak casually.

"You want to see me?"

"You bet I do. Come into the library." He paused and added in a sardonic lifted tone, "If Erna will excuse you."

Timothy marched behind his father with long conscious strides that denied the trembling of his knees. Behind him he felt Erna's gaze and it burned his back. I must look like a fool. He makes me follow him like a dog. Damn him to hell. His fingers twitched and he ground them into his palms. Damn him forever and ever.

His father closed the door and they faced each other.

"What's all this nonsense I hear about your going to see Mr. Drake?"

"I wanted to know——"

"Why couldn't you ask me what you wanted to know?"

"I—you——"

"Well, speak up, speak up!"

"I knew you wouldn't like—approve——"

"You're damned right, I wouldn't." He glared at Timothy with indomitable eyes. "I never heard of such a thing. As if you didn't trust your own father."

Timothy, terrorized by the bursting face and starting eyes, felt the defiance of despair. His shoulders hunched themselves up toward his pale face as if to protect it from losing all its blood. He stammered out, "I gotta right—I gotta right——"

"Right! The right to make your father ridiculous, I suppose?" Mr. Doan thrust his face forward and it approached Timothy's with a horrid spider-like slowness. The eyes were popping out, pressed by his rage, and across the whites ran an intricate network of veins, bloody, araneous. "You got a right—you got a right." His venomous imitation of his son's desperate voice returned it to Timothy's ears in a humiliating whine of fear and immaturity. "You bet you got a right. You got a right to stop all these damned ideas of yours and go back to college where you belong. And if you don't, young man—if you don't——"

Timothy, shaking, opened his trembling white lips. He wanted to shout, "And if I don't?" but the voice that came out was a quavering whisper. "Well?"

Mr. Doan drew back and pressed his protruding lower lip until it covered the upper. His hairy fist, as strong as a workman's, came up in jerks. "You can get out of my house!" He released his breath. "I guess that will bring you to your senses before you ruin your life."

"All right," whispered Timothy.

"And as for that little fool who's in love with you," went on Mr. Doan contemptuously. "As for her——"

Timothy waited and the room turned gray under his eyes. He tried to breathe, to fix his attention to some solid object. The floor rose and wavered under his feet. Gripping his hands together at his sides, he looked up and saw his grandfather's face, dim on the wall, bold in his memories of childhood. The Solid Hosiery of the Doans. The fortunes of the family in the shape of women's legs. The thought, errant and irrelevant, tapped an hysterical snicker. He wanted to throw his arms about his own body and laugh—laugh. The family dignity. It was simon-pure humor.

"You'll do no marrying there for quite some time to come," said Mr. Doan brutally. "I took the precaution of cabling her father last week. That'll put quite a crimp in your dove-cot, if I'm not mis-

taken. A disinherited son isn't a desirable son-in-law. No, not exactly."

"I don't want your money." The room had settled itself now into its ordinary arrangement of immovable colored objects and the floor was a flat dependable surface of bright wood and rugs. A sense of freedom, a lessening of his bodily weight, came to him as he spoke with the finality of an ultimatum.

"You little fool!" His father's anger was cooling into contempt. "You don't know what you're talking about. You're an ignorant young fool. What can you do without money? Money makes the world go round. Not love. Money. Do you hear? MONEY! And don't let anyone tell you anything different."

Timothy stared at him and forgot his fear in seeing his father for the first time in an unrelated character. The large head was thrown up in an intrepid and detached pose. The chin, clamped into place, would hold until death all acquisitions while determining its further prey. The hairy fingers were apart and curved to grasp again and again, knowing success heaped upon success and all the successes mating and prolific for his advance. His eyes between worn lids were formidable, fearless, ubiquitous—the eyes of a director of men—a collector of dependable dollars—the son of his father. And the grandson stood against the tradition, a weakling with an apprehensive face and flinching voice, raw head

and bloody bones, all but his will prostrate and unbearably ashamed at feeling terror.

"Now listen, my boy." Mr. Doan's lowered voice approached Timothy with dulcet intent. "Listen to reason. Suppose you had a son——"

"It's no use," said Timothy. "You could never make me be like you." He found his pocket with numb shaking fingers and drew out the watch his father had given him that morning. "Here's my birthday watch—your bribe for my conduct today." He said the words to himself, under his breath, rehearsing them so that there should be no flaw in their delivery. "It wouldn't be right to keep it now." The words repeated themselves in his mind. They would do. He would say them. He began, "Here's the——"

"What's that—your watch?" snapped Mr. Doan.

"Yes. I——"

"What's wrong with it?"

"Nothing. Only—only——"

"Only what?"

Timothy laid the watch on the desk. What had he been going to say? "I think I don't——"

His father folded his arms and drew down his mouth into a curve of venom. "You ungrateful little puppy!"

He raised his voice and as if swept before the noise and force of it, Timothy turned to the door. As he opened it he heard his father fill his lungs in a great gust of breath.

"Get out of here!"

Through the door after he had closed it upon his hurrying young heels, he still heard the voice, hoarse and cheated, leaping after him.

"Get out of the house! Get out of the house!"

VII

SHAM was waiting on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Forty-Second Street, butted and prodded by the midday crowds. His hat was pulled down protectively over one eye and he screwed up his face against a sun that day turned autumnal. "Can't you ever be on time for your dates?"

"Only fifteen minutes," panted Timothy. "Mr. Drake kept me."

"Well, fix your hair back and put your tie on straight," said Sham, critical and cool. "Come on, let's get home for lunch."

"Can't. Got something to do right away." Timothy frowned mysteriously at the sidewalk, aiming his gaze at a torn envelope that was straying with the wind. "Sham. I got a job."

"What job?" Sham's tone was superior, gently protective, the voice of a tutor.

"In a bank. Two weeks from today."

"How much?"

"Well, to begin—you know—until they see if I can do the work and everything——"

"How much?"

"Sixty a month."

"Sixty a—huh!" said Sham.

Timothy kept his eyes on the envelope. It flopped over and skidded into the gutter. He began to squirm under Sham's disapproving silence. At last he looked up and said, "I've got to begin, haven't I?"

"Sure. But if you begin in a bank you'll end there, too." Sham wheeled about and with his shoulder against Timothy's, began to walk up Fifth Avenue. "You haven't any right in a bank, Tim. Say, you can't even keep your checkbook straight. In five years you'd still be earning the same money. For God's sake, why did you pick out a bank?"

Timothy shook his head and stared at the sky with bewildered eyes. "Mr. Drake thought—he gave me a letter——"

Sham snorted. "If you ask me, he's probably in cahoots with your father. That's why he wants you to take a job you can't keep."

"Well, I will keep it. You'll see. I feel I can do anything now I want to. I just think of working for her and I could—I could lift the Woolworth Building."

"Oh, cripes!" said Sham. "You talk like a kid. I'm a year younger than you but I bet you right now I could go get a job and hold it down and get a raise pretty quick, too. Yes, you bet your life I could. But you—" He bumped Timothy's shoulder in impatient affection. "The trouble with you is that you've got no head for business. Maybe you ought to try writing poetry. That would be

crazy and impractical like you. Sixty dollars a month! Huh! You'll certainly be in the soup, Tim, after you spend your grandfather's money."

Timothy looked up with uncertain dependent eyes. "You think I ought to get something else?"

"Sure you ought. Why don't you go sell bonds? Lots of money in bonds."

"That's a good idea. Bonds. Where do I get them?"

Sham looked at him in disgust. "At the ticket window of the Grand Central Station!"

"I mean—where do I get the job to sell them?"

Sham shrugged his shoulders and Timothy, chilled and troubled, went along by his side. Girls in smart suits and furs warming their throats, passed him unendingly, their fresh eyes turning to the windows of the shops, their faces bright with rouge and the eagerness of possible acquisition. They left a trail of perfumes, expensive, French, select, behind the stepping of their impeccable shoes. Warned of his meager prospects, Timothy studied their exorbitance and felt his courage failing. Erna's white and silver dresses, her fur coats, her hats for every day in the month. Erna, in love with lovely garments and seeming in them as poised and presentable as a princess, would soon be depending on him to maintain her royal appearance. Sixty dollars a month. That is, if he kept the position. He'd better find out in the morning about selling bonds.

"When do you and Erna think you'll get mar-

ried?" Sham said. "But I guess her mother will be the one to tell you that when she comes."

Timothy gave him a glance of alarm. "Oh, that'll be next year, I guess."

"I'm glad you've got some sense about something," said Sham. "I was afraid you would try to do something idiotic. You're such an ass, you know."

"Why am I?" demanded Timothy. "Because I won't knuckle under to father?"

"You ought to," said Sham.

"But I hate business. Especially stockings. I wouldn't be any good at it anyway. What you can't realize, Sham, is that I can be happy without a lot of money. And if I had to fight to make it and everything I'd—I'd—well, I'd rather be dead, I guess."

"What about Erna?"

"She thinks the same as I do."

"How long will she though? Say, you know a lot about girls, don't you?"

"I know about Erna."

"Oh, you make me sick. Say, I don't blame your father for throwing you out, you old—" He gave Timothy an exasperated fraternal poke with his elbow. "Better come on home and have your lunch. Mother said——"

"I'll be up in time for dinner. Say, Sham, if a telegram or a letter comes for me just put it in my room, will you? where it can't be lost."

"Now how could it be lost? If you aren't the ——"

"Well, goodbye, Sham. I've got to go now."

"What's the idea of the mystery? Go where? Better go take some lessons in common sense." He turned away. "Pip-ip."

Timothy waited by the curb and watched Sham stop a taxicab and enter it with an important collegiate air. His face already wore the shrewd alert expression of a man of affairs occupied with the gathering of money and privilege—the look of business centering in the American eye, bright and round as a dollar. Even Sham's hat looked potent and provident as it sat on his head awaiting its moment. A bright young man, a go-getter. He would be the first at the office, the best informed on conditions, the last to go home, advanced in record time, praised for his sharpness and industry. Yes, even now he could get a job and hold it down and manage a raise pretty quick, as he had said.

Timothy, his fingers searching for his wallet, sighed and felt himself confused, inadequate, expatriated. Then his fingers touched the license, folded in his pocket, and his heart jumped up in delight and fear. The future lit itself in his mind like a flame and warmed his weakness. She chose me, not him. She swore she'd stick. She wants love, not money. My sweet noble little girl.

He drew out the license and gazed at it, tenderly, soberly, before patting it back into his pocket. From

his wallet he brought a list of apartments. Furnished apartments, cheap and small. The first on the list was in One Hundred and Third Street. He had better take the Elevated and save the cost of taxicabs. Henceforward his economies would be personal and secret. What he saved would be for Erna's pleasure and adornment—soft silk and silver lace over which her metal hair and smoky eyes would shine out in gay and childish loveliness.

He buttoned his coat over his racing heart and turned west to find her a home.

VIII

The room would have affronted their eyes, nostrils and intelligence had not all their faculties been in suspension. It was the room where one and one were added and found still to equal one. One in this mysterious calculation had been obliterated between the signs plus and equal. $1+1=1$. Yet two stood before a shabby desk, breathing poisonous air, beatific and nearly dumb before the power of civil arithmetic, a divine essence swelling their veins—the ichor of immortality that once nourished strong old gods.

Here sex was redeemed from nature and made sacrosanct. The spiritual bathtub and community soap. Here were godliness, cleanliness and arithmetic, if Timothy and Erna, their predecessors and their successors had been able to receive any of these things into minds clogged with rapture.

"And you are Timothy Bleeker Doan?"

"Yes, sir."

"This is Erna Swift?"

"Yes."

The man's toothbrush moustache seemed to be draining some secret spring, less felicitous than tears.

Timothy squeezed Erna's hand. Their emotions mounted, climbed, soared. Each question, each answer, was a fresh anointment. They raised their drugged faces to dull cracked spectacles as to the rapture of sunlight. The abracadabra went on, the necromancer and his spell. The wand was waved, the lamp was rubbed, spirits from the vasty deep made shadowy gestures behind the reality of foul atmosphere. They troubled the air at Timothy's brow only for as long as he needed to raise his hand and put back his favorite lock from his addled eyes.

Felicity gathered in his already bursting heart, in his tense and trembling muscles. He felt the equivocal need to try his strength against something —to race, to dance. The outlet of savages at the marriage feast. No, that wouldn't be exactly spiritual enough. Perhaps he should pray. Erna's face was quite white with sacred fervor. It looked drained of worldly thoughts. A holy ecstasy, detached from his enchantment, pressed down her eyelids. Her nostrils seemed not to draw the air, to be removed from that earthly necessity, preferring to retain breath she had already sanctified by her prayer for their happy union. It was a pity, he thought, that he did not believe enough to pray, since this was the most wonderful moment in a man's life, no matter what the cynics said. Right here was where a man began to understand the ordering of society, the handing down of the law to protect a woman and her children, to make him a responsible

provider for his share of humanity's trust. Oh, Erna, I will, I will!

Exaltation, haze and maze. From the bristles of the toothbrush came the words he had thought would sound as clear and important as a trumpet call. "—mumble mumble man and wife." Erna stirred by his side and dropped her head. The spectacles and moustache remained turned on him, indifferently expectant and amused. They seemed to be waiting for something. Money? He fumbled in his pocket and the bristles waved out in a smile. A large hand rose up and made a brief sharp gesture toward Erna with its thumb. He heard a brisk whisper. "Kiss her."

He swept up his wits and turned to Erna, red now and smiling a little. He kissed her gravely, formally, without pleasure. The room seemed to be in suspense—Erna, the witnesses, the moustache. He no longer felt himself infallible as the protector of a family. He was wondering how he might best get himself out of the room. His feet were dubiously placed, moving at random and in perplexity, his legs perfidious, his eyes unruly, blurred—he hoped no one had noticed.

Now over the threshold that had received the pressure of so many indecisive feet—perhaps some had turned back, having come so near—stepped Timothy, Erna touching his side as he walked in happy retreat. His steps seemed to enter his ears in triple divisions of sound to which he gave a mean-

ing. Man and wife—man and wife—man and wife.

He dared at last to look down into Erna's flushed face. The nostrils were breathing now and her gentle piety had bloomed into gay relief. She slipped her hand into the turn of his elbow. He closed his arm on her touch with a shiver of ecstasy. His wife. Forever his.

"Oh, I'm glad that's over," she said as they went down the steps. "It smelled to heaven in there, didn't it? I couldn't breathe."

They walked quickly to the taxicab that was waiting for them. The stench of heaven. To him it had been a faint and holy incense surrounding them like a promise of kingdoms, imperial perfume in a precious locality. He felt the weakness of his exaltation as he opened the taxi door for her. He didn't remember that he had had no breakfast that morning.

IX

Mrs. Mignonne Anderson from whom Timothy had sublet the apartment was waiting to deliver keys, directions and warnings. Her duties as landlady done, she stood over Erna and patted her soft shy cheek. "My goodness, you're only a baby," she said. "Poor kid, you don't know what you're up against. Good thing you don't." She drew down a black spotted veil over her magenta complexion and struck a pose, tilted and stagey, at the door.

Light-headed from emotion and hunger, Timothy shook her hand again and again. "Thank you, Mrs. Anderson. Thank you, Mrs. Anderson."

"Good luck, children. I guess you need it." She smiled and sighed, her black-rimmed eyes looking from one to the other. "I remember when I got hitched to Tom Anderson out west. I mustn't have been much bigger than this little mite. Crazy kid, I was, and couldn't rest easy till I got a job with him in his vaudeville act. Off we went and me with a kid's ideas of what a grand time I was going to have on the road. Well, it wasn't long before I was do-

ing a single in the southern tank towns and him out on the Sullivan and Considine circuit. I've been doing a single ever since—a diving act, summers—till I got a cramp in my back. Can't do it now, though I feel homesick, I tell you, every time I see a tank."

Timothy, close to Erna's pale blue suit, twisted his feet restively and moved forward toward another handshake. "Thank you, Mrs. Anderson."

"Yes, thank you," said Erna in her sweet piping voice.

"Good luck to you." Mrs. Anderson opened the door. "Now if anything goes wrong just call up Mr. Snyder. He is a nice gentleman and a good friend of mine. Just use my name."

The door closed on a whiff of lilies of the valley and stale whiskey. They moved a little toward each other and listened to Mrs. Anderson's crooked high heels as they pecked at the cement floor. Then they slowly turned their heads in the quiet dimness.

"Erna!" His eyes, wide and luminous, opened at their widest to receive into his mind and memory the impression of a new Erna, strange and miraculous, a matron still a maid, timid, happy, twisting small virginal hands and waiting—waiting. "Erna, can you realize—I can't—we've got a right to be here. No one could take you away now."

"Mother wouldn't pay any attention to our rights," said Erna practically. "If she finds me—well, we can't hide forever, Timmy."

"She can't!" Timothy cried. "Don't you be afraid, Erna. She can't, she can't!" He put out his hands to her and rushed to enclose her in a frantic pressure. "You've got me to protect you now. Forever, Erna. Oh, I love you, I love you! I'd die for you. I would, oh, I would!"

Erna listened with a charmed and excited face. "Timmy, you're so *savage*. I never knew anyone like you before. You take things so *seriously*, Timmy. Do you really love me so much that you'd die for me?"

He stared over the cockade of her hat and his face grew pale and fanatical. "Oh, I would, Erna! I'd be glad to. Death wouldn't be terrible at all if I could do something for you."

"That's *sweet*, Timmy. I like that." She lifted her face, animated and grateful. "Kiss me, Timothy. I think you're wonderful."

He pressed her mouth in consecration and stood clinging to her and trembling, a little shamed for his awkward extravagances, yet relieved that the force of his emotion had brought with it the speech of daring, a frank caress. She thought he was wonderful. He thought she was wonderful. All life was wonderful today—his emotional life—the only life that counted to him. Beyond the sun-warmed circle in which he stood with her was that other life of confusion, disapproval, misery of spirit, the business of money-getting, knowledge, the starkness of values he would never apprehend. These

and other dark half-suspected things surrounded his bright oasis like tall enclosing walls, warning silently by their height and blackness while he stood with Erna in warmth and peace, happy in his moment, unshadowed by walls because the sun of youth was high.

They went down the hallway and stood at the door of the room Mrs. Anderson had called the parlor. It looked dusty and forlorn, scarcely lighted by a narrow court.

"It isn't very—" Timothy began.

"What does it matter?" said Erna. She smiled and her fingers stirred in his palm. "It won't be for long."

"Maybe a year," said Timothy. "I won't make much money before a year."

"I meant our families," said Erna. "They won't let us live here. After they forgive us——"

He looked at her fiercely. "I don't want them to forgive us. I want them to leave us alone."

Erna laughed up into his frown. "Mother won't ever leave me alone. She'll fuss over me all the more now. And as for daddy! Oh, there'll be such scenes, Timmy, as you've never seen."

"Well, I won't be around to see them," said Timothy. "They probably won't even speak to me."

"Of course they will. Mother likes you. And of course they admire your father."

"Do they?"

"Of course they do."

"Why do they? Do you mean for his business success and all that?"

"I don't know. I suppose so."

His eyelids settled down over his eyes, maturely. "Just wait till you tell them I'm disinherited—that none of father's success will ever touch me."

"Don't be silly. Of course it will."

"But—" He stared down at her. "Why, Erna, I thought you understood about——"

"He's not going to stay mad forever, Timmy. Sometimes I think I know people much better than you do."

"What do you mean?" His lips closed, grew narrow under his quick doubting. "Did you believe that after we were married my father would forgive us and—give us money?"

"I thought he probably would. Not that it matters. Oh, Timmy, you know that money doesn't make any difference to me. Of course, I'd rather have it. But if not—I'll be happy just the same, Timmy, here with you." She waved her white glove at the dingy chairs and put it on his arm.

He looked gloomily about at the decay of the Anderson *pied-à-terre*. "It's awful, isn't it? Especially now that you're here, looking like a—like the cover of a fashion magazine." His eyes went to the window and studied the grayish unhealthy light. "You wouldn't even know the sun was out from here. I know what we'll do, Erna." He caught her in his arms. "Let's go to some little inn over in

Jersey and stay for two days. Would you like that? We can't spend our first—our first day cooped up in this place."

She danced up and down, clasping his arm. "Oh, let's, Timmy. And it'll be further away from mother, too. Let's go right away. I'll get my bag."

"Change your things, Erna. Sport clothes for Jersey. Long walks. I wish we had the dogs, don't you?"

She ran ahead of him down the hall. "Open my trunk for me."

"Where's the key?"

"Come in till I find it."

After he had spread apart her wardrobe trunk, he went to the door. "Well, I'll—" She was slipping from the jacket of her suit and unbuttoning her skirt. As he looked, it fell to the floor and she caught it up. "Oh, there's dust everywhere, Timmy!"

He went to her and examined the bands of dust across the delicate blue cloth. "Too bad," he said.

"Oh, dear! My new suit!" She shook her round bright head and her eyes went to his face in a sweet helpless appeal that shot into his heart.

"Poor Erna. No maid now. I'll have to do things for you." He kissed her and as he held her up so strongly that she stood on her toes he thought all at once, She has no skirt on. Releasing her, he muttered, "I'll go change."

"What's the matter?" she asked. "Why do you look like that?"

He laughed, glancing away. "I just happened to think—here, I'll hang that up for you."

She gave him the skirt and stood, slender to thinness, in blouse and pink knickerbockers. "Brush it first. Where's a brush?"

"I'll find one." So she didn't mind not having a skirt. How silly he was to think of it. They were married now. Still it was strange all the same. Different from when they had lain all day on the beach, bare-legged in bathing suits. Everything was changed now and the change hadn't come subtly but with a shock of intimacy that puzzled him. He found a brush and then hung up her skirt in the closet. "I'll be ready by the time you are. And I must telephone before we go to the country."

"To Sham? Are you going to tell Sham, Timmy?"

"No. Not yet."

"Who are you going to telephone to?"

"Hannah. Our old cook, you know."

Erna, busy with the buttons of her blouse, opened her eyes at him. Her soft pointed chin lifted itself from the frills of her collar. "Why—what are you going to tell her for?"

He turned in the door. "Oh, we're very good friends, Hannah and I. She always looked after me when I was a kid—when mother was busy or away."

"But it's sort of queer, Timmy, to tell her first—a servant."

His face moved uneasily. "I know. But she's a sort of friend. I mean, she's told me everything about her life and I always told her everything. I care a lot about Hannah. I thought maybe later on—if you were willing—we could have her with us."

Erna lifted her amber eyebrows, fine, brushed and as narrow as threads. Then her astonishment lapsed into indifference. "I'm sure I don't care. If you want her——"

"Well, it wouldn't be for a long time. When I'm making fairly decent money. I'll try awfully hard, Erna, from the first minute I go in the bank. I'll work harder than anyone else. They'll just have to recognize me. Maybe in two or three months ——"

"Of course they will, Timmy. Now hurry up and get dressed." As he passed through the door she called after him, "Timmy! How do we get to Jersey? In a taxicab? I'm afraid of those tubes that go under the river."

He laughed from the sour dark hall. "I'll get one and tie white ribbons and old shoes on it. Then we'll drive by your house."

X

TIMOTHY'S mind was excited by the memory of an inn he had once seen in a magazine devoted to decorative and imaginative cottages set among emerald grasses and lakes of Italian blue. It would be charming to find a sort of *châlet*, perhaps, of white stucco and golden brown beams under a peaked red roof. Gardens, of course. Even a view, softened by a veil of mist. But somehow there didn't seem to be anything like that along the battered Jersey roads. Nor could the chauffeur, frequently appealed to, help him out.

The meter read ten dollars fifty when the taxicab slowed down to inspect a corroded gray house that bore the sign Kirschbaum's Family Hotel. In place of a lawn there was dust. Instead of gay flowers to arouse the eyes shavings strewed the ground, blown from a half-built house across the road. And where he had hoped to see an arbored walk, lay a rusty trolley line to Jersey City.

They climbed down and looked about at the dejected scene. The sun, already low in the sky, passed behind a thin cloud like a discreet old man whisper-

ing behind his palm. The door of the hotel opened and a sharp-eyed, dull-footed boy came out and dangled a leg between the posts of the railing, watching and whistling. The engine of the taxicab was chugging, shaking the air. The chauffeur leaned forward and silenced it with a careless and expert gesture.

Timothy wheeled about to Erna. "This isn't what I meant at all. Perhaps we shouldn't have——"

Erna looked at her watch and her eyes became executive as they glanced from the hour to the hotel door. "It may be better inside. Anyway, if we don't stay here we'll have to go back to New York. I'll go ask that boy if there's a room." She went up the forlorn walk, slim and smart, childish in her sport suit.

Timothy waited by the cab. He felt reproved, as reproached by the deterioration of their romance as if he had designed their surroundings and hadn't known until now that they were not beautiful. This setting for their first intimacy! Erna who should have been guided through russet forests to a place of loveliness—a pavilion set among leaping colored fountains—had been jolted in a taxicab to—this! His young mouth felt dry and bitter and his throat swelled. She must be despising me. I can't let her stay here. Even a hotel in New York——

He ran up the walk. "Erna!"

She turned and nodded. "There's a room," she called to him.

"Wait!" He rushed up the steps and pulled her arm. "It's too awful," he whispered. "We'll go back."

"No, Timmy. Let's stay. I don't mind." She smiled up at him with sweet soft eyes and he caught her hand.

"I can't let you. You—in a place like this!"

"Now, Timmy, what difference does it make? We'll go walking—over there in those woods."

He watched her face with heavy miserable eyes. "You'll always have something—unpleasant—to remember." With shame he felt his eyes grow wet and turned his shoulder to her, pretending to look at the trees across the unfecund fields beyond the raw new house. He saw the chauffeur in the road, strolling by his car, waiting. He must decide quickly and regret later whatever decision might prompt itself to his uncertain lips.

"Timmy—let's stay."

"All right." He went reluctantly down the steps, feeling in his pocket for bills, the beginning of his paper resources from old Timothy's perspicuity in the stocking market back in the days when hosiery was truly solid and fastened high above the knee. Soft, dark, and flat, the odor of sweetish chemicals still clinging to their webbing, the bills changed palms and secret linings, going, precious and poisonous, to a new warmth, and indifferent to the progress of their cycle.

He brought back the bags and the boy led the way

inside, going to a board on the wall where each bed was represented by a hook and key and each key was hung with a clanking star as a caution for the absent-minded. Climbing the stairs behind the boy's sour shoes, Timothy bent his head and shuddered against an impulse of curiosity to look up and receive into his spirit shameful details of walls and furnishings, stained and musty objects of Germanic origin and domestic taste already two generations old.

He walked on stiff legs and had the sensation of mounting the stairs on stilts. A fear of balancing forward and falling seized him, the sensation of a dream from which he would presently wake to find himself in the hospitality of Sham's bed. The bags he carried were dragging from his hands. He felt a distaste for opening out their clean and civilized contents as if the grit under his feet and the miasma of this unpleasant house would contaminate the freshness and purpose of his linens and Erna's silks. He thought with a sudden wild impulse of the impossibility of a flight to the woods across the fields where a hard bed of pungent sweetness could be had under any tree—like those summers he had gone camping with Sham and Fred——

"Here's one you can have." The boy had stopped just beyond the top of the stairs. "Or number thirty-four if you want to be near the——"

Timothy closed his eyes and burst into an explosion of coughing. He stumbled past the boy and into a room where he set down the bags and turned

a crimson face to Erna. Had she heard? He arranged the bags side by side and without looking at her said meaninglessly, "Well—here we are."

Erna followed him and they stood together, staring at the floor and listening to the sound of adolescent and tuneless whistling. The door closed but they remained riveted. He was afraid she would hear his disturbed breathing in the silence so he bent over his bag and when he had unstrapped it she had left his side.

He turned and saw her narrow figure at the window, its profile fresh, nubile, delicate—like a Roman girl's on a mauve and white shell. "Erna, I can't stand this."

She swung about to meet him and her mouth looked grave and wistful. "You'll spoil everything if you keep on. Just don't look at anything—except me, Timmy."

"Erna!" He ran across the room and laid his hands on her shoulders. They were small and round and fitted into his palms. "You're wonderful. You're an angel. You're——"

"I'm your wife, Timmy. Funny, isn't it? Last year I said I wouldn't ever get married. I thought how old all the girls seemed to get as soon as they had husbands. I wanted to be young and dance and flirt and—well, stay young. I wouldn't ever have married anyone but you."

He wanted to kiss her but waited to watch the thoughtfulness in her eyes. She was right about

marriage. It had made him older, too, just planning it and thinking about the future. How silly dancing and flirting seemed now beside the real things in life. Love and its sanction. Life without love was like a house without windows, a girl without a face, he thought as he filled his eyes with pink and white planes of soft flesh and their gay decorations of eyes and lips. He was standing in the space of time that preceded their embrace, in him the purpose, universal in its fervor, of every man who had ever loved before him. Peasants, fierce in their simplicity. Kings, a little bored even with new female faces yet willing to go to war for them. This primal design, passed on to him without aberrations that could have twisted his delicacy into a sterile disrepute, began to beat within his chest and scream to his mind to take notice of its coming of age. His mind stirred and nodded in his skull, brightening his eyes. Soon, soon. She seemed to him so young —tender and trusting. He didn't know that he was, too.

She began to smile and a shadow of self-consciousness passed over her face. The flesh under her eyes blossomed with spreading color. "Let's walk. I want to go to those trees we saw and get some leaves."

"All right." He forgot the room, its smell of age, its poverty. An excitement, bright and brittle, tugged at his arm. A silent straining happiness held itself against his body. I've been unhappy all my

life to buy this. He wanted to tell her his thought but she had already opened the door and was calling back to him.

"Lock the door, Timmy."

They went downstairs and through the empty hall. The air outside smelled faintly of burning leaves and nipped at their nostrils as they breathed, walking hand in hand, shoulders touching. He looked down at her, moving small and dependently beside him, and his heart seemed to open over her in an impulse of his most intimate blood. Its muscles, expanding with the rhythm of life itself, leaped to enclose a treasure in a hiding place which only death could uncover. He pressed his hand to his side to calm the fury of his exaltation. His other hand closed about her fingers more and more tightly. He felt her wince and with a cry caught up her glove to his mouth.

"I'm sorry—oh, I hurt you, didn't I? I didn't mean——"

"Get off the track, Timmy. Here comes a car."

An ugly painted box of wood and glass stormed down the tracks from a curve of the road and rushed by them, swaying in short jerks. Its metal voice broke the peace of the air in a series of bombastic clangings. Leaves stirred, rose, settled by their feet as they watched the car ride away.

He took her hand in his gently and they walked past the naked new house and with their faces turned up at the sky saw the dusk floating down upon them.

"I like this," he said. "I love to be in the country."

"All the time, you mean?" Erna looked up at him and opened her eyes in the little stare she always used.

"Of course. I wish I never had to go near a city."

Her stare grew more serious. "Why, Timmy, don't you adore New York?"

"I hate it." He frowned and his lips tightened. "I just—well, I hate it, that's all."

"But why? New York is wonderful. Even mother admits that and she can't stand anything else in America."

"Oh, I guess New York is all right as cities go. It's probably the best city in the whole world if it comes to that. But I like to be in the country."

"But *why?*"

He moved his shoulders. "Oh, I don't know. It's hard to explain. It's so quiet and peaceful. And no one bothers you. And there's always grass and trees and—animals. And you can watch things grow. That's what I like best. Now in cities——"

But he couldn't tell her with words. Before his troubled eyes rolled out an immense map of tender green meadows and ripe fields edged with woods and watered with calm blue rivers. Some days the air was yellow with sunlight, golden with heat that drew up everything hungry and alive from the melting earth. On other days that had for him an even more sensitive and yielding beauty because they made him sad, the wind would be soaked soft by

rain, the great trees would be heavy with it above their glistening trunks and the earth would drink and feed the green things at its breast. His eyes passed on over his map and touched with repugnance the cities and towns, seeing them as ulcers on the sweet body of the countryside, destroying with disease the health and harmony of nature.

"The country is nice sometimes in summer," said Erna. "But I wouldn't live there all the time for *anything,* Timmy."

"But maybe after a few years you might like it, Erna. Especially if we——"

"If we what?"

"Well, if we——"

"What, Timmy? Say it. If we *what?"*

He began to blush in the dusk and his voice broke as it left his throat. "Well, we'll probably have—I mean to say, it's perfectly natural that we'll probably have——"

"Timmy, I'll slap you. What?"

"Babies, Erna. You know—children. We'll ——"

She bent her head and he waited for her forgiveness. His heart pounded in his chest. Why had he spoken of it now? She would think him bold, indelicate. An agony of shame spread over him. He was covered with it, burning.

"I don't want any." She lifted her head and her voice was calm and without self-consciousness in its reflections.

"You don't want—children—Erna?"

"No."

"But why—why—I thought you'd just love children."

"Well, I wouldn't. I don't want to be tied down—and old."

They stopped before the first line of autumn trees and gazed at a burnished strip of sky in the wake of the sun. Her hand in his felt all at once obstinate and its little bones were set against his from the rebellion of her thought. He pressed it with his fingers, begging it to be pliant and in harmony with his affectionate flesh. Finally it moved, withdrew itself, went to his arm.

"I'm cold. Let's go back. Put your arm around me, Timmy."

He flung his arms about her small shoulders and lowered his head. They kissed in the chilling air and warmed each other with their breaths. She laughed and stood down from her toes.

"Your nose is cold."

"So is yours," he said. Restored and happier, he held her as they walked across the rocky field. She was right to want to keep youth by her as long as it would be held. There was plenty of time for the other things. They would come later, following the days of dancing and thinking youth was the most important appearance. And his work. He mustn't remember it tonight. Its uncertainty startled and froze him. Only the present was to enrich him

now. The first day of his new life—his eternal love —Erna.

At the end of the field and squatting sullenly by the roadside they saw Kirschbaum's Family Hotel, lights hanging to the two lower windows now, like an old hag who had put on her earrings.

XI

They looked at the dining room and recoiled into the hall, sent back by a blow of white lights above red and green paper flowers. The linen, less white than electricity, was spread on one long board and its barrenness and scanty steel instruments gave rather the air of a dissecting table than one dedicated to a pleasant fusion with food. The bedroom, unsympathetic as it was, seemed preferable to such blinding publicity.

With so much power used to dazzle the eyes of diners, it was unlikely that enough could be spared for the functioning of bells upstairs, which if used at all, probably summoned hot water from six to eight in the morning—when cold weather warranted the trouble. Yet they rang, in hunger and hesitation, and presently the boy they had seen before dragged his feet to the door and came in without knocking.

"We'll have dinner up here," said Timothy.

"You mean you ain't coming downstairs?" The boy's loose mouth shaped itself into a circle of astonishment. "Why ain't you?" He looked at Erna, sitting by the window. "Is she sick?"

Timothy ignored him. He said to Erna, "I suppose there's no such thing as a menu here. What would you like?"

The boy took his weight from one foot and gave it to the other. "There's lamb stew, cold lamb, *gefüllte Fisch* and eggs," he recited . . . "Potatoes, canned peas, apple dumplings and cawfee."

"I suppose the lamb, Timmy," said Erna. "With plenty of bread and butter, boy."

"You can't have butter," the boy said. "Not with meat."

"Why not?" Timmy looked around and met the narrow eyes, already practised in some dark form of shrewd knowledge.

"Because mom's awful orthodox. Everything's run strict kosher here."

Erna and Timothy united their glances as the door closed. She left her chair and went to her bag, saying, "What's kosher, Timmy?"

"Economical, I suppose." He joined her at the table and, leaning forward, watched her draw out a white robe. It was like fur made of silk or silk made from fur, striped delicately with pallid blue. The separate fine strands were looped in fantastic design and had they been of brown they would have reminded a traveller of coverings furnished John the Baptist by makers of frescoes and mosaics. But here lay only a pleasant suggestion of massive hair, a light excitement of refined and buried eroticism from which the roughness had been taken by cen-

turies of shamed and weakened follicles. And so the emblem was passed to a chair and Timothy waited for the procession of nightgown and slippers, simpler symbols for his inexperience.

"Here it is," said Erna. "At the bottom, of course. The thing you want is always at the bottom."

"What are you looking for?" he asked from his ecstatic daze.

"My Shelley. I thought we'd read a poem tonight, Timmy. And I thought—maybe—you'd write me one. About us. On the blank page, here where my name is. My old name. It's Erna Doan now, isn't it? Not Erna Swift any more. Erna Doan. Doesn't it sound queer? Oh, Timmy, write it now. Will you, Timmy?"

He stood away from her, flushing, his hands seeking his pockets. "I don't know if I could, right now like that. I'd have to think a long time, dear. It's a sweet idea."

"You know, Timmy. About our walk—the trees —how happy we are—our escape from everything —oh, *please,* Timmy!"

"Well—I'll see if I can think of something." He sent his strained gaze to the ceiling and began to walk up and down. "I don't think I'll make it narrative, if you don't mind. The best poetry is sort of—well, made of impressions—images and reactions, you know. Let me see. First love about us like a white cloak—no, mantle. Happiness in the

folds—I guess I'd better have a pencil. Have you got a pencil, Erna?"

"No. But my fountain pen is in my bag. I thought I'd write mother." She plunged both excited hands into silk and chiffon. "Where—where—I'll have to take everything out, Timmy." The table received the delicacies of the bag, heaped up billows of pink and white, interlaced wreaths of embroidered flowers on edges that otherwise could not have been defined to Timothy's simple eyes. "Here, dear."

The door opened again and they turned. It was the boy, shuffling in on half-grown legs.

"Mom says—she says you'd better come downstairs. If the lady's sick you can bring her up somethin' yourself. You from New York? We had a man last week said he was from New York. Gave me a quarter when he went."

From the dignity of his new estate Timothy looked down at the offensive messenger. "Tell your mother we *prefer* to have dinner up here. If there's any extra charge she can put it on the bill."

"I'll tell her. But mom don't like—" He closed the door.

"Wouldn't you think you could get a little politeness if you paid for it?" said Timothy.

"You said just the right thing to that dirty little boy." Erna closed her lips into a disdainful pink flower and went to turn on the light.

"Well, you have to be firm sometimes," Timothy

said, pleased by her praise. While she spread out her intimate silks, he went to the window, hands stuffed into his pockets, a sensation of importance and power rising up to join his nervous excitement. In the darkness that made a black panel for the glass, he saw reflected the room he had not yet dared to examine. Almost slyly he looked at the bed in the corner and his heart jumped against his ribs. He remembered a visit to his cousins in Chicago when he had been ten years old. He had climbed into bed with Hazel and they had lain there, her doll between them. She herself had seemed like a doll with fat yellow curls that somehow frightened him—too well-made and golden to be thought of as ordinary hair that grew to be washed and cut. Aware of some curious difference between them, he had watched her while she talked to her doll, touching its pink bland face with her delicate fingers.

Only now, remembering that distant morning, he realized that in identifying her with her doll he had been trying to express the difference between her and himself. It had been a difference of sex, not of sawdust, that he had felt. And now, ignorant of fundamentals except for adolescent experiments and the rumors of an amoral campus, he stared at the bed painted on glass. He felt afraid and inexperienced. His old passion to touch Erna, to kill his separateness in a death of such darkness and heat as he had felt the first night he had kissed her in his room at home, was being forced out of him by the coldness

of his fear. He who had been going to offer himself in a flame of romantic desire had better sit down and compose a poem of love about a white mantle. He sent out his breath in a rush of despair. I'm always wrong. What's the matter with me?

"Timmy."

"Yes?"

"Pull the curtain down."

"All right."

"I've taken everything off the table. It's ready for dinner."

"Is it?" He came toward her, looking at the faded green cover with apathetic eyes. "Oh, Erna, if we had only gone somewhere else! I feel—I can't tell you——"

"Oh, don't, Timmy! Can't you just be a little practical?"

"If it were only any other time in our whole lives except tonight!"

"I know. But it isn't."

Standing there in efficient wool, her situation accepted, he saw her childish and capable—more happy and more resourceful than he. And he despised himself bitterly. "It's my fault, Erna."

"Timmy." She came to him and put up her arms, her face pale in the feeble star of light over their heads. "Kiss me. Don't think of the hotel any more."

The softness of her lips comforted him and he was warmed by her hands on his shoulders. He kissed

her again and she pressed closer to him. "You don't act as if you loved me tonight."

A quick fire ran through him and stopped at his heart. "Erna! Oh, I just worship you! I'd die for you this minute."

Her eyelids, as white as shells, looked up at him blindly. Her mouth trembled and rose to his.

A blow given with the back of a hand struck the door and it opened on their embrace. They drew apart, staring with faces dazed as if with sleep at the woman who stood there. She was broad and stumpy and a checked brown dress covered her to the neck. From there the red flesh spread up over her face whose gaze was as coarse as the hands she was wiping on a cloth. A wind of practical hostility swept into the room with her, pushing against them and taking their breaths. While she tilted her body at them like a heavy sack, she examined their faces in windy enmity.

"Well!" She sucked her breath through her teeth in a sound of triumph. "No wonder you wanted to hide yourself and not come downstairs!" She advanced across the floor with heavy threatening feet. A look of spiteful virtue darted at them from her eyes, narrowed like those of an animal before striking. Close to their paralyzed faces she thrust hers and spoke sibilantly in the discords of a vulgar and betrayed righteousness, whose experience with frailty, although mercenary, had strengthened without having humanized the chaste fundamentals of

her character. "Aaaah! Thought you could get away with it in my hotel, did you?"

"I thought if we paid extra—" Timothy's voice faltered but his hand flew to Erna's with reassuring speed and closed firmly on her fingers.

"Paid extra!" Mrs. Kirschbaum transferred her venomous gaze to Erna. "Not in my house, young lady. I'll have no immoral goings-on under the same roof with my little Abie."

Erna stared back at her. "Oh!" She began to blush. "Timmy. I know what she means. She thinks we aren't married."

Mrs. Kirschbaum snorted. "Married! Do you take me for a fool? Children like you, married!"

"Yes, we're married," said Timothy in a bewildered voice.

"This morning," added Erna timidly.

She looked as if she were going to cry and Timothy threw his arm about her stiff little shoulders. "It's all right," he said to her. "I'll explain."

"You won't explain nothing," said Mrs. Kirschbaum acidly. "Show me your certificate."

"Yes—of course," said Timothy. He drew away his arm from Erna and felt in his pockets. Then a lost look of helplessness flowed over his face. "My other suit—when I changed at the apartment——"

Mrs. Kirschbaum's red face flamed in victory. "I thought so. Now pack up and get out, you two. Quick." Turning away, the small arrow of her gaze struck at Erna's silk adornments, culpable, diapha-

nous, clinching. Her lips drew apart in the immovable judgment of her environment and curled their bitter dislike of flesh. "Aaah! A nice start you're getting. Where's your mother? Next time you want a night out, young lady, don't try to get in with a respectable Jewish family. *Our* girls get decent bringings-up. And you there, young man ——"

Timothy's desperate eyes rose to hers. "I say—you're all wrong. I can prove——"

"I don't want arguments with you. You should be ashamed. Now pack up. Go on. I'm waiting."

Erna began to cry. She sat down in a chair, her face on her arm. Her sobs, rising, tore at Timothy, died down with her breath, rose again to small soft wails.

His hands were shaking. It was almost impossible to fold Erna's things into her bag. His fingers moved, forcing themselves to small motions as in a dream. Her clothes, impalpable and perfumed, curled about his fingers. He struck them off as one would discourage the playing of a kitten at the dressing of a corpse. His body burned and in the cavity of his chest a disconnected mass was moving in terrible activity.

He laid Shelley on top, closed the bag and straightened himself numbly. His body and Erna's felt estranged from him, two offended intimates that must be brought back. Standing by her chair, he bent over the ruffled head and put his palm down

to it. "Erna. Come, darling. We'll go. The apartment—" The locks of her bright hair shone up at him above her buried face and from underneath them the sound of a sob wandered out, touching him as it passed and repudiating him, he thought. "Erna. You must—oh, I'm sorry——"

His eyes were blurred and hot. He winked and squeezed out tears. One fell on his hand and he shook it off, setting his teeth with a hard snap into his lip. His shame for his inadequacy and inexperience had numbed his nerves and he scarcely felt the pain he longed for. He bit again, deeper, felt bone sink into mucus and presently tasted the salt of his blood.

Mrs. Kirschbaum moved heavily in the doorway. He could hear her breathing as she waited. He lifted Erna from the chair and whispered, "Your hat, dear." He sent a defensive glance at the door and saw in his brief reception of the woman's image that her face was less ruddy, less righteous. Although she was not doubting herself, she was probably being pressed by pity, an uncomfortable contact for an upholder of public morals and the traditions of Judean womanhood.

Erna, wilting by the chair, put on her hat. "I'm so ashamed," she whispered. "But I'm not sorry. I'm not, I'm not."

"Sssh! Let's go. Hold my arm, Erna." He set on his hat and picked up their bags. They walked to the door. I ought to say something to her. What?

I'd like to knock her dead for what she's done to Erna.

Mrs. Kirschbaum held the door wide as they passed. "They's a trolley going by at half past seven," she said. Her voice had fallen from its raucous tones. It gave information with the impersonal service of a traffic policeman.

Timothy looked at her with steady eyes. "You're a bad old woman," he said. "You're the wicked one —not my wife."

Erna's hand tightened on his arm. He pressed it to his side and her bag bumped his knee and, recoiling, pushed her from him. They went down the hall to the stairs and as they began the descent, the pallid curious face of Abie peered around a corner to watch them go away.

XII

TIMOTHY walked to the door of the kitchenette on his toes, holding his hands behind him. "Breakfast ready?"

"Timmy Doan, where have you been?" Erna's soft mouth pouted at him, its corners disappearing until it seemed no bigger than a child's. "I've called and called——"

The devoted black lock on his forehead fell over his eyes like a screen that covered their excitement. "I had to go out for something." He shook back his hair and his dark eyes shone out again. "Turn around. Don't look for a minute."

"What *is* it, Timmy? Your breakfast is getting cold."

"Turn around or it'll be colder."

"All right." She shivered and drew her yellow mandarin coat closer about her nightgown. "I wish they'd put on the steam heat. Hurry, Timmy. You'll be late again at the bank."

"There! Now look, Erna."

She turned to see pink roses by her plate, strong-stemmed and sturdy, the leaves stiff and vital enough to quarrel among themselves for a place, the heads

drooping together in an affectionate community of dependence.

"Oh, they're lovely!" She lifted them and pressed their color to her face, still drowsy, pale from the chill of the morning. "I've always adored roses."

"Poor Erna! Think of all the orchids and birthday presents you would have had today if you hadn't married me. It makes me sick when I think of what you used to have—and now——"

She looked at him over the buoyant heads of the flowers and at her movement they nodded with her. "Yes. But what difference does that make? I'd rather have you than all the things in the world."

"Would you really, Erna? Do you mean it? You're not—discouraged?"

The buzzer over the dumbwaiter drowned out her reply. She laid the roses down among the cracked dishes and crossed the linoleum's stains and scars, holding up her golden coat. "Oh, I hate that iceman. Why can't he ever come at a civilized hour? But he won't."

Timothy's eyes, heavy with sadness, rested on the brightness of her coat and hair, then drifted back to the roses. She in this wretched room was like a beautiful jewel a thief had hidden in his lousy cap. Yes, I'm no better than a thief. I'll take her away from here no matter what it costs. I'll spend all the damned money in a heap. Get some more somehow. How? How?

He clasped his hand to his head and followed her.

The ice creaked up to them and he carried it to the gangrened old box in the corner. "There. Now come to breakfast, darling. Poor Erna. If I'd known what you had to go through with me——"

"Oh, Timmy, don't begin!"

He dried his hands and brought out a folded paper from his pocket. "Sit down and read this."

He poured the coffee while she spread out the paper. "'The places where you are not——'"

"No. That's crossed out. The next line."

She began to read:

When I leave you my heart becomes an island
Its only scene, my darling, is your face,
These roses (nineteen, sweet) will greet your smile and
Touch your eyes with kisses in my place.

"It's not very good," he said in a thin defence. "I had only ten minutes—while I was taking my bath."

She bent toward him across the table and her eyes, as cloudy as when they were born nineteen years before, sent him admiring love while her pale fingers curled to protect the paper. "But it's marvellous. I don't see how you do it. I could never—Oh, Timmy, look! It's quarter past eight already."

Her anxiety was charming and infantile. He watched her face as he began to eat. "Going to see a man at one o'clock, Erna. His brother has an advertising house uptown. He might——"

"But you're always seeing men—and it never does any good. Can't you see him tomorrow, dear? I thought you'd have luncheon with me today."

His face drooped over his plate. "I'd love to—but I think I oughtn't to let a chance go by."

Erna swept her chin into her hand and pushed back her cup. "I think your father is just—*hateful!*"

"Oh, Erna, if you only liked the country! I still have enough money for a little place." An appeal as swift as fright jumped at him from her eyes. He added quickly, "I guess we'd better stay in New York. But not here. I——"

"Your father might——"

"No, he never will. I'm just an outcast to him now. You don't know how hard he is."

A bell rang. She sighed and left the table. He listened to her slippers tapping down the hall and crammed a piece of cold toast into his mouth, looking at the clock. His life now seemed made up of fighting time—an old game at which his nervous inexperience always planned to beat him. Except for the evening hours, he felt like a convict though he himself opened the wire door of his cage every day, as much a slave as any captive who built the pyramids, fed on garlic and radishes. No hours now for books, for thoughts, for Iberian castles. He lived Thad Hobart's life—but without the praises for it—a misfit of doubtful future.

He got up and rushed from the room. In the

hall he met Erna, letters in her hand. He kissed her and opened the door.

"You didn't eat your breakfast. Oh, Timmy!"

"Yes, I did. See, I'm going to eat this going downstairs." He held out a piece of toast. "Any mail for me?"

"No. But here's a letter from mother marked London. She's coming at last, probably. Wait till I read it."

He started for the stairs. "Can't. I'm late. Good-bye, darling."

"Can you come home early? I'd love to go to tea and dance."

He looked back doubtfully. "You know how it is around the first of the month. We're kept after——"

"Oh, *Timmy!*" She clung to the door and tears of disappointment swelled her eyes. "It's my birthday. And I want to go somewhere."

The pain in his heart made his eyes a hard fixed black. "Telephone Sham. He doesn't go back till next week. He'll take you."

"Oh, thank you, Timmy. I will. And I'll call you up this afternoon."

"No, don't." He started down the stairs. "They don't like it."

"I don't care what they like," she said and slammed the door.

Her voice, the high notes of a flute, still quivered in the fog-colored hallway as he ran down the steps, forgetting the cold toast he held in his hand. Dis-

covering it at the subway entrance, he flung it into the street, then stood before the paper-stand in horror, watching the loaded rotundity of truck wheels crush what seemed to him at the moment the exclusive handiwork of little Erna.

The wheels rolled away and where they had passed lay a contaminated crust, now beyond Timothy's appetite, however penitent and loving—even a starving man would scarcely overlook its unfitness. Only a pariah dog, eager snout skimming along gutters, would nip it down and scour the place where it had laid. Timothy, hesitating on the curb, glanced about, half expecting a dog to appear—or even birds to descend at his feet as they had once swarmed about the sandals of St. Francis. Had he been free to indulge such a whim, he would have stayed there until the destiny of the crust was decided. But time nipped at him as his dog might nip at the bit of bread if he could only wait to see. He turned and ran down under the skin of the earth.

In the train he stood between rows of seated men and women, all mute in the roar. The devastating glare of the lights paled their faces. They seemed only half-filled with blood. Perhaps they were pale because, like him, they were afraid of being late. A feeling of foreboding crept into him, the uncontrollable and increasing sense of fright that tortures a sick person on the way to an operation. Everything about him irritated his thin nerves. The noise, the trembling white lights, the silent grimness of the

motionless men about him, their lives suspended as they were rushed along in the belly of a great mechanical reptile.

He looked at the faces of the men, each freshly shaved according to ritual above a clean stiff collar. Each pair of eyes was alert with a watchfulness that went far beyond an interest in newspaper headlines. All those eyes held a look of vigilance—as if someone had lighted a bomb and they were waiting for the explosion. They were harassed, on the defence, waspish and wary—the guarded and fiscal eyes of the American business man. Like his implacable father, these men so determined on business were galvanized by a relentless current of ambition that probably played through them even in sleep and leaped to its full force when they sat down at their desks every morning.

He drew down his lips in a bitterness that was weak and young, conscious of unfitness, despising himself for it as much as he despised the relentless will of his father. He thought, I can't be like them. I'm no good. Business is the only emotion all these damned machines ever feel. All they want is energy enough to do everything better and faster than the next man. And get more money for it, even if they don't need it. It's a madness. But the national ideal. I can't be a hundred-percenter and a go-getter like Thad and Sham. Sold my birthright, father wrote. He meant the stocking business. Thank God, I did. I wish I could go live on an island.

Business a thousand miles away. I can see all these men here on some coral strand. They'd start to organize right away. Specialists in stripping cocoanuts, eight hours a day. The best fishers would work from nine to five with a half-hour off for lunch. The housing committee would plait leaves for the first sanitary huts ever seen in those parts. The vice-commission would hunt down all the blacks and tie grass skirts on them at the point of a gun.

Forty-Second Street. He pushed his way out, frowning at his thoughts with irritation. He had forgotten to read the paper. And where was that book on banking he had planned to study while riding back and forth? He had left it on the table in the hall. Hannah's face smiled into his mind. When he was a little boy she had often said, "You would be forgetting your head if it wasn't tied on." He gazed at his memory of her face with affection and wished he might talk to her. He would telephone her after dinner. He would ask her to tell his mother to come to New York on Sunday in the car and take Erna driving.

At the corner of Fifth Avenue he saw a young man standing at the curb. He looked as if he had already been there for hours. He wore a heavy suit and his trouser legs looked as round as stove pipes. A straw hat sat high on his head and gave his face a look of constant surprise. Timothy stared at the placid and rather stupid blond face. It had a look of detachment, content and courage. He thought

he would like to ask him questions—where he came from and why he wasn't in a hurry. Probably some hick, come to stare at crowds and tall buildings. Just now he seemed to be counting the automobiles as they rushed past, for his lips moved steadily. He hadn't even the cheap protective sophistication of a small town. He was plain country-born, bred and willing to stay there—a rarity among farmer boys and probably denounced by all the other young men in the neighborhood for his lack of modern spirit.

Timothy hurried on in long jerky strides, away from the peaceful face on the corner. At the door of the bank he shut his hands together in a desperate grip and threw a last glance at the massive line of buildings that surrounded him in an artificial horizon of stone, misplaced, brutal, unjust. His nerves continued to tighten as he hung up his hat and went toward his cage to sow numbers as that boy on the curb would soon be sowing wheat. He would perform all day and endless tomorrows the operations Mr. McCann had shown him the first week—those days when he had come with elation, certain of understanding everything and impressing everybody.

But now as he approached the cage he felt that even the black-browed, opulent-hipped Jewess who had come yesterday knew more about the science of banking than he would ever know. As he passed, his unhappy glance rested on her, bent over her ledger calmly in a corner with the patience and purpose of her race.

XIII

At eleven o'clock Mr. Daintry, chief of the working staff, came to Timothy's cage. Timothy turned to face him and felt his heart kick against his ribs as he met the glitter of spectacles. The gleam of light on the two spheroids was aimed at him, he thought, with ferocious meaning and he almost closed his eyes against it. I'm fired. Oh, God, I'm fired. He felt an impulse to protest, to fling himself at Mr. Daintry and tell him about Erna.

"We're going to switch you, Doan." Mr. Daintry fumbled with the door. "Come with me." And as Timothy followed him in weak silence, he said, "You're pretty healthy, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I've never——"

"This grip epidemic's rather bad. Four men out today." He opened the door of another cage. "Morning, Gates." Turning his head, he waited for Timothy to come closer.

Timothy pressed himself against the edge of the door and stared at the head cashier with anxious eyes. Mr. Daintry had a quiet and baffled face but behind his sharp glasses there seemed to be a store

of pressing energy about to be loosed. When he spoke his lips snapped open, sent out their words with the precision of a telegraph instrument and nipped together again. Timothy, meeting the intense glass gaze, began to blink, hoping to appear animated and intelligent. Evidently he was not fired. For all he could guess, he might even be promoted.

Mr. Daintry jerked his head back toward the cage. "Mr. Gates, this is Mr. Doan. He'll be with you for a few days. Now, Doan, Mr. Gates will put you on to the work. I don't think you'll have any trouble."

"Thank you. I'm sure——"

Mr. Daintry sent his head forward in a quick nod and turned away. His stiff boots struck the corridor in a double sound—a hard noise for the heel, an insinuating flap for the toe.

Mr. Gates cleared his throat and put out a flaccid hand. He was slow and pale, a sexless-looking man with a straight forehead that seemed licked at the roots of his flat hair. "Come in. Sorry there's not room for two stools."

"Oh, that's all right," said Timothy. His voice sounded thin and eager. "I'll stand here."

"Let's see. First you'll want to learn the books." Mr. Gates pulled them out, long, thick and with funereal covers. He opened the one on top and Timothy saw rigid rows of dead additions and totals —impeccably arranged figures, marked on the

bleached body of the page with all the meticulous care of an engraving. "These, you see, are——"

A customer appeared, thrusting his face against the bars and slapping down a check. "Well, how're they coming for you?"

"Can't complain," said Mr. Gates. "How'll you have it?"

Timothy stared at the book and drew a breath, stomach-deep, of air that smelled of cobwebs. He saw the country boy on the corner and his free-flung rows of grain. He strode through a Millet landscape, singing, harmonious with his fields, his steady eyes seeing sun, soil, growth and all things that were good for him.

"*That's* all right then." Mr. Gates closed the book and slid another across it. "Now this book—" He opened it. "This one——"

"Good morning." A man presented his bifurcated face at the window. "In tens and twenties, please."

"Been away, haven't you?" said Mr. Gates.

"Well, yes, I have. Out to Yellowstone Park with the wife. Oh, boy, some scenery!"

"So they tell me." Mr. Gates counted out pressed bills.

"You ought to go," said the man. "Oh, boy! And mountains? Say!"

"Ye-ah. Guess I ought to," Mr. Gates said.

"Nothing beats it in Yurrip," said the customer.

"That's what they say." Mr. Gates turned back to Timothy. "Yellowstone Park!" he said bitterly.

"I'm glad to get to go to my wife's father's place on Staten Island summers. How'd I ever make Yellowstone Park?" he demanded.

Timothy looked at his aggrieved mouth and felt for the first time the comradeship of poverty. "I was there once. When I was a little boy—with my grandfather. I had a rotten time."

"That so? Well, now you see at the end of the day we add up these numbers on the adding machine and count the money. The sum of the checks paid out plus the cash in hand should equal the daily debit."

"Oh, yes. I see."

That much was clear. But those books—Mr. Gates kept opening them, running over the pages with bored hands, pointing to digits with a blond forefinger, inserting a remark between the covers, explaining totals that came from mysterious sources. Between broken sentences he served his window and noted down numbers in mechanical routine. From time to time he lighted the butt of a cigarette, and after inhaling the smoke, put it back covertly under the counter.

Timothy shifted on his feet. He had been standing for an hour, bent before the door into a servile attitude of attention, murmuring at intervals, "I see." "Yes, I understand." His mind felt as if it were feelers thrust out for grasping explanations that, when seized, turned into powder that dropped away. He repeated to himself, "The sum of the

checks paid out plus the cash in hand should equal the daily debit." That sentence, complete from the aggrieved lips, he had pat. The rest would come. Thoughts of Erna kept intruding. It was her birthday. She wanted to go dancing. How sleepy she was mornings when the alarm clock rang! The morning he had wakened before the clock had sounded to steal out and leave her to sleep, she had telephoned to scold him. He remembered how she had cried when she read his father's brutal letter; how she had sat on his mother's knees when she had come to see them, listening to Mrs. Doan's mournful predictions of their future with a faint little smile of disbelief. "The sum of the checks paid out ——"

If Erna only liked the country! Bending again over the incomprehensible books, he felt a longing spread through his body like a paralysis—a nostalgia of skin and lungs that slowed his blood and blinded his eyes against small cages filled with men and their artifices, false sunlight and numbers like black grain scattered over pages—automatic bundles of new banknotes as green as grass with the green blush of spring upon it. "The sum of the checks paid out plus the cash in hand—" Hand in hand, he and Erna walking over soft aromatic earth, pressing their feet into it as they nursed, like the young of animals. The horizon, harmonious with hills, clean of piled-up stones. The leniency of uncovered space for their limbs to move in. The only sounds

those that would come from the throats of their dependent beasts.

He crossed his hands and sent his nails into his wrists. He wasn't being fair to Erna. He should be learning, not dreaming. He would get pencil and paper and ask again about each book. He would write down the answers and know them tomorrow. The next time Mr. Gates turned from his window he would——

"Well now," said Mr. Gates, getting off his stool. "Tend bar a minute, will you? I'll be right back."

"All right," said Timothy. "Now about the books——"

"Say, you did fine with them. Didn't take you long, did it? I'll tell Mr. Daintry as I go by."

Timothy's mouth hung suspended. He swallowed the words that had been checked and watched Mr. Gates close the door.

At half-past twelve Erna telephoned.

"Oh, Timmy, I couldn't wait another minute to tell you. Mother's back!"

"But that letter this morning——"

"It came on the same boat she did. She's coming tonight. With father. Oh, Timmy, I'm so excited!"

"I'd better go out somewhere then."

"You won't! Timmy, if you dare!"

"Well,—all right, then. But, Erna——"

"And I called Sham up. He's going to take me dancing. Sure you don't mind, Timmy?"

"Oh, no, dear. Of course, I don't."

"Sham's not going back to college. He's going to work."

"Sham's not going back?"

"No. His uncle is going to take him in with him. Five thousand a year, he said."

"Five thousand—five thousand to begin? Oh! That's fine, isn't it?" A pause. "Well, I'll be home as soon as I can, Erna."

He went back to the cage with a quiet white face. Five thousand to begin. And my sixty a month. My God, she should have married Sham!

XIV

"Put your coat on, Timmy. No dishes tonight. It's half-past eight. And brush your hair."

He stared into the sink doubtfully. "But Mrs. Anderson said not to leave them. She said bugs would come——"

"But not for eggs, dear. Bugs don't like eggs, do they?"

"I don't know. They eat leaves generally. Well —if you think it's all right——"

"Coat, Timmy. Hair. Change your shoes."

"Erna." He caught her at the door and turned her excited face to the feeble light. "You know today—when you told me about Sham—I—I suffered. I thought you might think about all the money he's going to make. I thought you——"

"Money again?" She brushed his hand from her chin. "Why must you always talk about money? Is it so important?" Her eyes, filled with their blue smoke, reproached him. "Can't you wait to see what's going to happen without——"

"I bet Sham thinks money is important," he said persistently. "See here—didn't he say anything about me today? Didn't he?"

Erna winked her eyes and began to turn away. "I don't think so. Not that I can remember."

"He did, Erna! You're not telling the truth. I bet he said I haven't any head for business and that I'll never get on without father. Didn't he?"

Erna's shoulders stiffened and her little pointed chin rose at him. "To hear you talk, Timmy, anybody'd think Sham wasn't a friend of yours. Why, Sham would do anything for us—for you!"

Timothy felt flicked by patronage. The soft zones of his face hardened, flattened into planes by the tightening of the muscles under his skin. "What could Sham do?" he demanded. "He needn't talk like a—like a patron of the arts. Why, he hasn't even begun to work yet. He can still go dancing in the afternoon!"

"Why, Timmy Doan!" Erna drew away from him. She pressed against the door and stared. "I never heard you talk like that before and I don't think it's very nice. Just as if I hadn't asked you before I went out with Sham! And now you're jealous."

"Jealous? Of what? Sham?" Timothy's eyes gathered bewildered lights. "How could I be—" He hunted for quick words to explain that what he had felt was inadequacy and pain for it. "It wasn't ——"

Erna's mouth began to droop and tears flowed into her eyes. "Oh! I wish I hadn't gone! I wish I hadn't! I wish——"

"Erna!" He flung his arms about her and strained her to him. Under his heart he felt the tap-tap of hers. "I'm not jealous. I wanted you to go. Only I thought—when you heard about his success—you might be sorry you married me—messed up your life——"

"Oh, oh!" She pushed away. "Oh, oh!" She sobbed and ran down the murky hallway. Her door slammed shut.

He followed, his dark astonished face turned to her door in distress. He rapped. "Let me in, Erna. Let me in." He heard her sobbing just beyond him and tried the knob. Locked. "Erna, darling, let me in. I didn't mean it. Oh, let me in!"

The bell rang. He listened, rigid, turning stupefied eyes down the hall, unable to move larger muscles than those of his eyes. Her mother and father. Their first call. He untidy. Erna in tears. He pounded on the door. "Erna! Your mother! At the door! Come out!"

Silence. She had stopped crying. He listened for her feet to come running to the door. "Erna!" He heard his voice agonized, hysterical. He swallowed and said calmly, "Erna, your mother has come. Please go open the door." Silence.

The bell rang again. Two long demands with a questioning tinkle at the end. He ran down the hall, turned on the lights in the living room and leaped at the door.

Mrs. Swift, a tall woman in furs, stood outside.

Behind her, her husband, a small man in a light top-coat, leaned on his cane. His bald head shone, pink and moist-looking, a formal and rather foreign shine, as if he had had it polished on some Paris side-street where the smart bootmakers hide away.

Erna's mother looked at him with faint calm surprise. "Don't be afraid. We haven't come to make a scene, Timothy." Then with a gesture of warmth she held out her glove.

Timothy shook it like a man's. "Erna—she's getting dressed," he stammered.

"Well, why not?" Mrs. Swift said. "Indeed, why shouldn't she?"

"We were late tonight," Timothy went on. "We —we——"

"Well, aren't you going to ask us to come in?" Mr. Swift said. He removed his weight from his stick and stretched out his hand from beyond his wife's thin straight back.

Timothy took it with a jerk and shook it. "Oh, sorry—oh, please do come in."

They passed into the gloom of the hall while Timothy closed the door. Turning back, he saw Mrs. Swift passing her glances from walls to ceiling.

"It's rather like one of those passageways at Luxor, isn't it, Hunter?" she said. "You dreadful reckless children!"

"In here," panted Timothy behind them. "Erna will be ready in a minute, I guess. Excuse me, I'll get my coat."

"Coat? Nonsense!" Mrs. Swift laid her hand on his arm. The chill calm of her restraint numbed him. "Sit down, you bad boy."

She opened her furs and from her groomed and elegant person an aura of perfume spread out and thinned itself among the shabby furniture. She chose a chair. Mr. Swift chose another.

Timothy sat down on the edge of the seedy sofa. He didn't know what to say. But he saw under her bantering calm that there was much to be said that evening. He wished Erna would come. He didn't dare to call her again. Her room was two doors away and privacy of sound out of the question. So with shaking fingers clutched about each other's infirmities he waited, watching their faces.

Mrs. Swift, quite at ease, arranged her fur collar, turning her chin, pointed like Erna's, this way and that. Her face was powdered to the look of thick smooth cream and her lips were smartly rouged. Her eyes, round and weary from pretenses and sincerities, ignored the room and Timothy was grateful to her for that. He had always been rather in awe of Mrs. Swift and the celebrity of her dinners and toilettes from Paris. His own mother was simpler than she had any need to be, deprecatory of display and what she called fine feathers. Even Mrs. Swift's slippers were a stimulation to the room and the white glitter of their buckles rebuked the sterile cluster of the sickly bulbs overhead.

"Timothy, how's your father?" suddenly demanded Mr. Swift from his chair.

"Well, I think," returned Timothy. "They would have let me know, I guess, if anything——"

"So naïve, isn't he? What a dear boy, Hunter!" interrupted Mrs. Swift in an annoyed purr. The osprey on her hat shook at her husband in reproach. "Now wait, my dear. We'll come to all that later."

"Of course, of course." Mr. Swift laid one hand on his hat and with the other stirred the carpet with his cane. In motion and under his wife's eyes he had lost the slightly foreign air that had played about him in the hall while he had stood ready to present himself briefly as a separate entity.

A door opened and the three heads turned as one toward the hall. Erna ran into the room, her face pink and gay. "Mother! Dad!" She kissed them and flung herself on her mother's knees. "I'm so glad! Oh, mother, everything will be all right now you've come!"

Timothy stared at her. Girls were queer. To look at Erna no one could guess that she had just been sobbing behind a locked door.

"Well, darling, I must say you look happy. Doesn't she, Hunter?"

"Of course I'm happy. But Timmy isn't."

Timothy opened his mouth and closed it. Blushing and pushing back his embarrassing hair, he said in a hopeless voice, "I guess they can see why I

wouldn't be, Erna." He threw out his hand to present the room to their attention. "When I think what I've done to Erna—I didn't know it would be like this—to be poor—It's terrible. I wouldn't blame you if you never spoke to me again, Mrs. Swift." His voice quavered and the sound humiliated him. He swallowed and, bending his head, stared at the floor.

"Love in a cottage isn't as comfortable as it might be," Mrs. Swift said. "But I daresay it didn't hurt you to find it out." She pressed her cheek to Erna's and held her fast to her knees with both arms. "Did you think mother had deserted you, darling?" She looked across the room at Timothy's black head. "I would have stopped it if I had been here, Timothy Doan," she said. "The most insane thing I ever heard of—at your age. But since you both chose to act like a pair of lunatics in my absence I thought I'd leave you alone to clear your heads and do a little repenting."

"Timothy can do all the repenting by himself," said Erna. "I'm glad I did it."

Mrs. Swift looked at her husband and nodded. "In that case," she said.

Mr. Swift stood up and laid his hat and stick aside as if he were checking them. He shook down his trouser legs. "Well, now, Maude," he said, "if you're in favor of finding out how things stand——"

She nodded again, a command at Timothy. "Yes.

Let's have the facts, Timothy. All the little facts, honest and naked."

Timothy stood up, too, his face pale, defiant and shamed. "We fell in love and when everybody went against us we got a license and eloped. The first night we went to New Jersey and the woman put us out of her hotel because she thought we weren't married. I sub-let this place for eighty dollars a month and I have a job in a bank at sixty. My grandfather's money is the only resource I have and I'm going to spend it all to get Erna a decent place to live."

"But why be so dramatic about all this, Timothy?" Mrs. Swift smiled gently, persuasively. "Money is something that will never worry the son of Edward Bleeker Doan."

With the crisply spoken syllables of his father's name, Timothy realized that this was what he had unconsciously been waiting to hear ever since Mrs. Swift had come. That was the equation that had been troubling her calm and weighing down her banter. The moneyed sound of his father's name. His name had bought tolerance for the son. He filled his lungs and stiffened his back. The room was quiet. Erna's face was hidden in her mother's neck. The maternal eyes with all their worldly calculating habits were computing his resistance. They were waiting. Mr. Swift's eyes, political, wary under his wife's presence, also waited but with the ex-

pression of a man to whom unexpected turns and blind alleys were less important, there being always room for a resourceful pedestrian.

Timothy felt his flesh falling from its bones. Only bones seemed to remain in the articulated framework that supported his stiff skull. He crushed his hands together, turning the knuckles between his fingers. His toes curled in their shoes, small and horny complications of his planted feet. Even his eyes felt corneous, polished and fixed in the bony sealed vase of his head. Bones he had but no blood —or nerves to be nourished by blood. Bones. Everything else stripped off for the revelation. Love, Erna, their life together. Perhaps these, too, would be taken away from him now. Down to foundations—bones and the tough structure of society. What he was going to say would end the covert conversation with its gentle breaths like polite fans and its insinuating assertions that demanded information with more exigence than a shouted question. "Get down to cases," his father had often said in anger. That's what those eyes were saying to him now. Cases. Facts in a few words. With a deadening sense of futility he dug his elbows into his ribs.

"Father threw me out because I wouldn't finish college. I must depend on myself, Mrs. Swift."

He addressed her with an instinctive knowledge of her authority over her family and watched her as she considered him. Her eyes filmed over with

a studied amusement that wanted to conceal the chill of her computations. They changed their shape as he watched, narrowing with her smile.

"But how natural, my dear boy. Your father had plans for you. You disappointed him and he acted on impulse. I daresay Edward Doan is accustomed to obedience. But that won't last. After all you're his only son." She gave a small false laugh as if to put the stiff room at ease. "Little *histoires* like that often happen. As they say, in the best families." She glanced at her husband, nodding an assurance. "I wouldn't worry, Timothy, if I were you."

Timothy, still staring at her, felt his flesh clasp itself back on his bones in an embrace of rage. Her comforting assumptions in return for his frankness. As if he were a child! Blood poured into his face and drained down into his body. His hands swelled with it and he held them out, stiff with bulging veins, against her affront.

"Father can go to hell!"

He heard his own words with a sense of astonishment and agreement. It seemed as if someone else had spoken. Then silence pressed against the walls, a silence they resisted with bareness and indifference, leaving emotions to the three faces that moved to focus on Timothy as if for a moment he possessed the mechanical power of a magnet. Then Erna's small face, whitened by his violence, rose toward him. She seemed about to speak but her head fell

back to her mother's shoulder and in this gesture Timothy felt she had put him away from her.

"Erna!" His strength flowed out from him and in his weakness he sank down again on the sofa. It creaked—a loud and ridiculous noise that reminded him of himself.

"Well!" Mr. Swift blew out the word. "Well, I must say—!" But he looked at his wife and left comment to her.

"Timothy seems upset tonight." She put Erna off her knees with vigor and stood up, thin and imposing, to make him a dull-edged smile of diplomacy. "Why don't you go to bed? Do, that's a good boy. Erna and I have three months to talk over, you know. I haven't had a chance to tell her about the things I bought in Paris. Oh, *such* frocks! And such a time I had at the customs!" She went to the sofa and patted Timothy's shoulder. "I brought her a complete trousseau to make up for not having any wedding, Timothy."

He looked up at her with dead eyes. He saw her furs, her encroaching gestures, the glitter of her rings and buckles, her determination on the rôle of *dea ex machina*. He closed his eyes slowly, saw the peace of darkness and then rose from the sofa as if it were a sick-bed.

"Good night," he said. "I'm sorry——"

"Good night," said Mr. Swift in a loud voice.

Mrs. Swift touched his shoulder and kissed his cheek. "You're my son now," she said in dulcet

affection. "You have two mothers to scold you instead of one."

He wanted to make her an answer but his stomach was twisting, lifting up in him with nausea. He put down his head and hurried from the room.

XV

"Timmy! Timmy, listen! Wake up, Timmy!"

He gazed at her from the darkness of his bed. Half of her stood in the light from the door. Her hair looked tousled by fingers. The air from the window was making a cold wind blow into the room across his face. He saw her shiver and move out of the light, nearer him, into the dark. The door slammed and shook the room. He could no longer pretend to sleep. He must explain, apologize, hear what had been said about him.

"Timmy!" Her hand, coming from the blackness about them, touched his face.

He reached his warm arm out from beneath his pillow and felt for her. "Erna."

Sitting down on the bed, she kissed him. "What do you think, dear? You'll never guess. No, not if you tried all night. It's too marvellous! Mother ——"

"She must hate me. And your father——"

"No, no! They don't. Wait till you hear what mother said."

Mother. Everything was mother now. The maternal comfort of knees. And hands, heavy with

rings, in Erna's short hair. A mother with a major-general's eyes and a will like a sword—a doting weapon, alert in its sheath.

"Timmy, don't you *care* what mother said?"

"What did she say?" He felt tired and old, humiliated before his time.

"Well, first she looked everywhere—in the corners and even in those closets we've never opened. And then she came to the kitchen. And, Timmy, there *were* bugs. And she looked rather sick and backed out and shut the door. And called father and told him and they whispered a long time. Then they told me."

"What?" Mysteriously in the small room's cold darkness he felt the presence of Mrs. Swift—her will and her imminence.

"We're going to live with them!"

"We're what?"

"In their house, Timmy. Tomorrow. Isn't it wonderful? I'll have my old room—I adore my room—and you'll have the guest room on the third floor, mother says. And when she goes to Palm Beach we'll have the whole house to ourselves. Now what do you say to that?" She put her face against his and kissed his ear. "Oh, I'm so happy!"

He lay quietly, his eyes on the gray oblong that was sending in the night wind, heavy with domestic smells. Across the court a man came to his window and spat. He saw him for a moment, outlined in pajamas against a lighted frame.

She moved in his arm. "What's the matter? Aren't you glad? You don't say anything."

"I don't like it."

"You don't like it? But why, Timmy? For heaven's sake, why?"

He wanted to reply, "I'd rather be alone with you." But that would sound selfish. So he said, "I can't accept all that from your mother."

"But it would only be till your father——"

"My father!" He threw off her arm and sat up in bed. "Erna. You don't ever seem to understand that there will be nothing from my father—ever. Not ever, do you hear?"

She sighed. Her breath touched his cheek and mingled with the persistent wind that flowed over them with its odors that came from other lives, pressing unseen against their walls. Her sigh seemed a protest against a repetition she had heard so often that it had become something to ignore. He waited for her to speak. She sighed again. Only a few days since she had cried out that she didn't want money. It was enough to be with him. He wanted to hear her say it now, sitting beside him in the dark. But she moved in silence and, turning back the quilt, crept close to him in her rustling dress.

"I'm cold, Timmy."

He seized her in his arms and warmed her. "Oh, I love you. I want you to be happy."

"You know I love you, too, Timmy. You know I do, don't you?"

"Yes, I know you do." He pressed his head to hers and kissed her, a passionate pain raking his heart. "I'll do whatever you want, darling. We'll go to your mother—for a visit. And I'll take you somewhere else—when you've had enough visiting." He saw himself in her mother's house, patted sometimes, sometimes frowned at, always questioned about his father. Erna in her old room. He on the floor above. The military eyes and the fond swinging sword of Mrs. Swift. The if-my-wife-will-permit manner of Mr. Swift.

He drew away his head and lay as if he were listening.

"What is it, Timmy?"

"Nothing. I was just wondering if—I don't mean the real country. But if it were a place near New York—so you could ride in any day you wanted to ——"

Silence. She seemed to be listening, too. After a long pause, animate with the rhythm of their breathing, she returned to kiss his lips with tender lightness. "Let's see what happens—first—Timmy."

His mouth twisted suddenly under her touch. He knew that again she was thinking of his father and his body felt as cold as if it were being blown upon by the night wind from the court.

PART II

I

"The tendency is there. It's spreading like slow poison all over the world. Look at Russia. Look at Austria and Germany. France is threatened, too. They told me when I was there that in ten years the left wing would rule the country. Italy will be the next. If it hadn't been for Mussolini—" Mrs. Swift cast a mobilizing eye about the table as if to assure herself that no one's attention was flagging.

Timothy heard the pause and looked up in time to be counted. Three months at her table had taught him the rules of her conversation.

"Well," said Mr. Swift. "Of course you're quite right, my dear." He nodded, his look giving its usual signature to his wife's words like the ratification of a treaty. His smile deferred to her, then accepted permission to go on. "But England and America have taken the warning. They gave their answer to Bolshevism at the last elections."

"Yes, we're out of danger for the time being," Mrs. Swift's glance passed over the faces of her guests. "But how long can we hold our own against the labor element? Just compare, as I was doing

the other day, the wages our working men are getting with what they received twenty—or ten—years ago. Consider with that the taxes on capital. The answer is only too clear. And that's not the worst symptom."

She stopped again and Timothy's eyes jumped to hers just in time to receive her full official gaze. It did not pass on, however, and his fork waited midway between his plate and his mouth while she prepared words, her stock of weapons against all the opinions he had innocently expressed his first week under her administrative roof.

"The worst symptom," she went on, "to my mind at least, is the what I might call deflection of members of our own class. Young men and women with half-baked ideas, taken from heaven only knows what magazines and newspapers—supported as everyone knows by the radical elements that Congress so unwisely permitted to enter our country."

Here she allowed her peroration to falter while she nodded a regnant head at the butler. Then, again pinning Timothy in his chair with her concentrated look, she sent forward her discourse with the air of one too sure of her powers of speech to permit the duties of hostess to turn her from one just word. A change of plates was to her no more of an interruption than lighting a match for his pipe would be to a hack editorial writer with his instructions from the owner of the paper fast in his head.

"The encouragement by these members of our

own class can but have a disastrous effect on the minds of the ignorant masses. You, for instance, Timothy. Do you suppose your attitude is unknown to them? Don't you know that every leader of the I.W.W.'s rejoiced at the way you voted on election day?"

Timothy felt the butler at his elbow and laid down his fork at last, blushing under the concentration of eyes. "How can they know?" he said, stammering. "They can't see into the booth."

"Ah!" Mrs. Swift raised her hand in executive triumph. "They have their own means of finding out everything. I'm told their spy system comes from Russia. And don't you believe that the son of Edward Doan can escape their attention. Ah, no! That's too big a feather in their cap."

All the guests pressed their attention upon him and he sat crushed under the weight of eyes and the name of his father. Mrs. Swift's gaze was not yet done with his afflicted face. She proceeded stringently to her climax.

"I've noticed that the power of money and its responsibilities never fails to change one's political views. Therefore, I have no fear for our Timothy's future. The day he comes into his own—" She smiled graciously upon his industrial dynasty—"he'll have a change of heart. He'll deal with our problems like the true son of his father." She threw up her head and finished on this dominant note of prophecy. The editorial over, she signalled a smile

to the table, as if to promise her silence and grant a permit for general conversation.

The eight guests relaxed and turned to each other. Timothy sent his chagrined eyes to Erna across the table where she sat silent, Sham at her side. He wanted her to look at him, to see his wounds and ease them with her smile. He hated it when there were guests. Then her place was set apart from him as if this convention in robbing him gave pleasure to others.

His appeal was unanswered. She had not been listening. He tried to read her thoughts on her face, now turned docilely to Sham's questions. Presently Timothy saw her hesitate, look at last to him. He drank her eyes, smiling with desolate love.

"Timmy," she said and leaned across her place. "Do you want to go dancing after dinner? The others are going to play Mah Jong."

"Yes, dear. Of course. If you want to." He watched her shoulders move as she settled back again against her chair. Shoulders white—as white as a white rose—against the gold of a dress from Paris. Pale confiding shoulders he could never know well enough, aloof now in the pride of their gold covering.

"Fine," said Sham to him. "You'll have to call up some girl, Tim, to make a foursome."

"A girl? Oh, are you going too?"

"Of course," said Erna. "He's the one who thought of it."

"In that case," said Timothy more loudly, "I should think you were the one to call up the girl. I don't know any girls—that is, to ask dancing."

"How about Marian Baldwin?" said Erna.

"My hat, no," said Sham.

"Peggy, then. You like her, don't you, Sham?"

"All right for necking. A rotten dancer."

"You're awfully particular," said Erna.

Sham gave her a long intense look. "Yes, I am," he said.

Erna laughed, a little self-consciously, and looked away. Her eyes climbed the wall back of Timothy and remained there, gathered infantine gravity that detached her from the others and gave her the air of a child placed in the conversation of its elders.

Timothy held his breath, while a new wound opened in his heart and spilled blood. Sham's flirting with Erna. That's why he wants to go dancing. He waited a moment for defiance to conquer his pain. He drew air into his lungs as slowly as water.

"Erna, why don't you and Sham go for a while? I'm dead tired. I—I'd like to go to bed early tonight." He waited for Erna's reply. Would she accept? He fixed the strength of his will to her lips as they parted. Her childish face, bewildered, turned to her mother's preoccupation, revolved to Sham and then to Timothy's concealed challenge.

"Well," she said, "I don't know." She came back to Sham's eager look and put it like a weight on her scales. "We might—for a little while."

"Good," said Timothy. He winced and went on staring at her, holding his lips in a tortured smile.

Mrs. Swift began the stir of departure to the drawing room. Timothy followed the others, frowning at his feet as he walked, holding his breath as if it could press against his pain. Perhaps she believes I don't want to go. She wants to spare me and be polite to Sham. I know she doesn't really like him. I'm just a fool. As usual. Nerves from the bank. From her mother. They can't let father's name alone. Especially when there are people for dinner. So afraid everyone won't know I'm his son. His only son. Wish to God he had ten others, all older. Erna doesn't see it, of course. Too young to be humiliated for me. She never thinks what it means to live here, sponging on them. I gave her my pride like a wedding present and she never knew it. I'm in a trap and I can't get out. Oh, God, I wish I knew what to do to get out! I can't stand it much longer. I can't, I can't!

He waved coffee off with a savage gesture. Everyone was talking, indifferently, digestively, in twos and threes. Erna stood by her mother and Mrs. Swift's proprietary arm was about the golden shoulders. Mr. Swift's disposed face talked cigars into two male faces whose features were as blank to Timothy's glance as if cut out from paper. Mr. Swift kept finding his wife's gubernatorial eyes between sentences, a sycophancy of continuous defer-

ence, and her approval seemed to be reflected in the mirror of his pink bare head.

Timothy left the room and went softly through the hall. I'll read. That book on banking. It seemed to wait in dark reproach. But in the library he felt depressed by silence and a sense of emptiness. He went to his room, the book under his arm. The physical fact of climbing three flights of placid stairs calmed him. But no sooner had he opened the book than his thoughts fled from him and went downstairs again to the drawing room. What was Erna doing? To whom was she talking now? He saw her in a corner with Sham, sipping her coffee, wetting her lips with it, smiling at Sham with wet lips, lifting her cup for another sip. Sham would tease her about the way she drank as he himself had often done. And she would laugh, content to be teased and called a little bird, smiling with vague smoky eyes and holding up her face as if listening to something beyond the distance that a voice could carry. Was she wondering where he was?

He stared at the milky delicacy of her face as it lay on the background of his mind like a moon against a dark sky. It seemed lovely and magical, permanently his own, unchangeable. But separated. He yearned for her across space, through distances. Even when she lay by him and he watched her in sleep she hadn't the closeness of flesh and blood. Part of her was strange and shining, of a congenital

innocence, the unawareness of a golden child who seems to know that it will die young and therefore has no need to learn the world. And she loved him. Twisting the book in his hands, he thought of her clinging fingers about his neck, lying in his hair like tuberoses in grass, touching his mouth in darkness. His heart swelled, pumping in his breast with quick thuds of delight. Erna. Erna.

He jumped from his chair and left the room. His silly pride. He would go with her and Sham. Running down the stairs he thought of her dancing in his arms, her shining head at his shoulders, her eyes turned up to his with their remote look of intensity, like an acolyte serving the altar with a Sunday morning face.

From the door of the drawing room he looked about. She wasn't there. He went into the room and searched each chair with his nervous gaze. Not there. Neither is Sham. They've gone.

Mrs. Swift, marshalling her guests to Mah Jong, saw him and beckoned. "Timothy!"

He crossed the room to her and waited with wide-open eyes on her peremptory face.

"Didn't you go with Erna and Roger?"

"No, I—I——"

"Well, sit down here. We're just beginning."

"Please—I have to study tonight—if you don't mind."

She glanced at the book in his hand. "Such a solemn book for a romanticist! I always picture

you, my dear boy, with a small volume of Rossetti or Keats—bound in *galuchat*—dragging at your hand. That poet's look, you know!" She raised her sparkling fingers and touched his hair. "Run along." And as he started away, "Timothy! By the way, I lunched with your mother today."

He turned. "You lunched with mother?"

"Yes." She nodded and her smile, mysterious and exultant, held him to an arbitrary place on her wide polished floors. "It's time the families came together, don't you think? I've never had the pleasure of knowing your mother well."

"I—I——"

Her smile deepened, taking charge of him, and her nod to his book gave him the feeling of a little boy being sent off to school. "Good night."

He stared at her dominant profile. What does she mean? What did she and mother—? They've never been friends. "Fine feathers," mother always said. He went back to the library. He might have known she would meddle. She would never be satisfied until she contrived a meeting with his father. Timothy's eyebrows twitched. It would serve her right to get up against father. Two old Tartars. How the fur will fly! Let 'em fight it out. I'll bet on father.

His book was heavy on his knees. Foreign credits. Domestic debts, his mind counterspoke. He dragged his attention back but it eluded him and flashed to the bank. Daintry's face, Gates with his eternal complaints, the cage he was trusted with now. Sixty

dollars still a month. The Jewess had been moved upstairs. She got eighty, someone said. When would he be promoted? The men told him raises depended on the arbitrary whims of Mr. Daintry. Timothy thought that it wasn't likely. He opened his eyes and began to read. The print wavered. Four lines into one. His eyelids fell, two dragging curtains. He shook himself. I should have had coffee. Better get some before I study.

Standing in the hall, he waited for the servant to pass the door. Clouds of fatigue rolled over his mind. He saw them, gray and black, sharp-edged and stiff like the clouds in a painting, lighted on their artificial edges by the faintly gleaming moon of Erna's face. He opened his eyes. I'll go ask Mary in the kitchen.

The kitchen was as warm as summer and Mary welcomed him with a wave of her arm, as red as if it had been sunburned. At the sight of her homely tired face Timothy felt his nerves settle down to rest under his skin. Her gesture to him was friendly —like a waving lantern to the man who watches from his engine at night to see a moving light that indicates the spot he knows as home.

"Might I have some coffee, Mary?"

"That you might, Mr. Doan. Should I make fresh for you?"

"Please don't." He leaned against the door, his finger slipped between the pages of his book. "Say,

Mary, I have some neckties for your nephew. Four, I think. And some gloves."

"Bless your heart, Mr. Doan. He's needing them all right, coming out of mourning."

"And some socks, too. If he doesn't mind having them mended."

"His mother'll do that in the evenings. Here's your coffee. Will you sit down to it?"

Timothy began to smile. "I love kitchens, Mary. At home I guess I spent half my time with Hannah. You and Hannah would be great friends. Hannah ——"

He stopped on his way to the table. Across on the other side by the window a girl was sitting, pressing her shoulders against the curtains as if she wanted not to be seen. He stared at the black hair that ran from the transparent skin of her forehead in a crest of heavy black feathers. He thought he had never seen such a quantity of hair or hair so black and frightened.

"It's my niece," said Mary. "And Mrs. Swift's engaged her for the upstairs work. Move yourself out of the way, Agnes."

Timothy glanced again at the girl as she got up to move timidly away, turning her startled white face from his eyes. He heard feet in a hurry and then a door closed. Poor kid. She feels just the way I do when Mr. Daintry comes by my cage.

"That will make it pleasant for you, won't it,

Mary? I mean, having someone of your own family."

"My sister's girl," said Mary. "Born up in Maine. She ain't used to the city yet. Excuse her, Mr. Doan."

Timothy nodded, his cup at his lips. He drank and said, "I suppose she hated to leave the country. She looks like—well, as if she wasn't comfortable in a city. You know, Mary." He couldn't explain his impression of Agnes and thought again of her black flying hair that seemed combed by winds.

Mary came to the table and folded her chapped hands. "Most of them are just crazy to get away to the cities."

He looked at her, thinking how Hannah had always stood like that, resting her worn hands on her stomach as if to comfort them. "Hannah was born in the country. She won't take a place in the city. She's always planned to go back to Ireland where her mother was born. She's saved all her money for that. She keeps saying when she gets old she'll go. But I think she's afraid of the ocean. Because she's been old enough for a long time——"

He broke off and gave Mary a repentant look. She was old, too, and perhaps he had hurt her feelings. More happily old than Hannah and less gentle—less sensitive to the sadness of her warped life. Her eyes seemed to affirm the pleasure of duty, the consolation of perpetual details to be redone each day unchangingly. No, Mary was different from

Hannah. It wasn't the same thing, talking to Mary. Between him and Hannah was the bond of an affectionate friendship founded in his childhood. Life had crushed them both and he had shown her his wounds and seen her scars. Even his mother had never flooded him with tenderness like Hannah for she had not needed him so much.

"Cross the ocean I would not—unless the Blessed Lord himself should order me," said Mary. Her expression combined alarm with piety and she tightened her hands across her stomach as if in a foreboding of the waves that threatened to rock it. "I want a nice dry grave, Mr. Doan, and a priest to bury me. I ain't what you call a natural traveler—like Mrs. Swift, for instance. I mean madame. I can't never remember to call her madame except when she looks at me as if she was waiting to hear it." Her cheeks wrinkled in a sly smile. "The first thing Agnes said to me today—though maybe I oughtn't to be telling you seeing she's your mother-in-law. She said, did Agnes, 'Easy to see who wears the pants in this family.'"

Timothy wondered if he should smile or look down at his book. It was an embarrassing moment in his relations with Mary. His decision was still hanging between them when the door to the butler's pantry opened and Mrs. Swift's beaded dress flashed at their eyes.

"Is Lyman here, Mary? I can't find him." Her eyes passed to Timothy, covering cup and book. "In

the kitchen again, Timothy? What a collegiate young man you are! You only need a wet towel on your head to complete the picture." She smiled, simulating graciousness as he got to his feet. "You'd better go to bed."

"Yes—I haven't been getting much sleep lately." He shuffled his feet under her executive look.

"Ah, that bank, that bank!" Mrs. Swift shook her sleek head, marcelled into rigid waves of obedient hair. "No elasticity there for romantic young men, my dear. A poet in a cage! I must say, it's very obstinate of you, my dear Timothy."

He went toward the door. "But I'm not a poet. Why do you——"

"You're too young to know what you are." She dismissed his protest and turned up her cheek to him as he passed. "Good night."

"Good night." He kissed her hard powdered flesh. "Good night, Mary."

He went quickly to his room. The flint-like mother of soft gentle Erna. As indurate in her will as his father. He undressed and turned out his light, leaving the door open to listen for Erna's return. In the darkness he beat the bones of his chest with his knuckles and turned his body from side to side. I exchanged one tyrant for another. Only violence got me out of father's house. And I must do it again. I'll get away from here if I have to tear the roof off.

II

On Sunday afternoon Mrs. Swift took Timothy and Erna driving in the park. "For an appetite," she said. But the windows remained closed against air that might have invigorated city blood and skin enfeebled by steam heat. Her Russian cigarettes recalled her corner of the drawing room to Timothy and he took short breaths of distaste while his eyes rested on old-fashioned canvases that moved across the window pane at his cheek—snow scenes too clearly detailed for the Impressionists but painted with the colors that had charmed them, as the sun, touching white surfaces, dyed them pink, mauve and grayish blue.

Mrs. Swift lighted a fresh cigarette. "Well, next week your father and I will be walking under palm trees and lying on the beach before luncheon," she said. "We'll think of the ice and snow of New York and read in the papers about blizzards. I always like to hear of blizzards when I'm at Palm Beach. I enjoy myself so much the more." She placed her hand on Erna's knee and tapped it with her cigarette holder, a long green stem that seemed cut away from some hard flower. "Don't you think you'd better come with mother, darling?"

Erna stirred between her mother and Timothy. He felt her elbow press his side in a signal of apprehension. "Oh, no, mother," she said in her fresh small voice. "I'd rather stay with Timmy."

"Oh, you two doves!" said Mrs. Swift in a tone of playful despair. "You'd coo in the Arctic regions, sitting on an ice floe!"

Erna pressed his side again, relaxing against his shoulder. Her body against his seemed to send him the warmth of relief and he found her hand under the rug and squeezed it.

"Next year—if things go well—we'll take the trip together," went on Mrs. Swift. "When you're your own master, Timothy, in a manner of speaking. You'll take your holidays then more or less as you please, you know."

Timothy found nothing to say and continued his stare at the sliding ground.

"Now, Mother," said Erna in a voice of soft warning.

"My darling child, I can't go on being quiet forever," said her mother.

"But—not now, Mother."

Mrs. Swift heaved a sigh. It sounded almost masculine in its control and depth. "Ah, well," she said, becoming feminine again. "Ah, well, my dear."

Timothy lifted his eyes from the turbid snow of the roadside and laid them on the nudity of praying trees. Trees had always been like people to him, dumb waiting creatures with branches like arms

which they held out open all their lives in a sort of static reception of sun and rain. In winter they seemed to ask for their leaves to return and hide their helpless bones—as if they knew that everyone thought their bare joints and twisted ribs were ugly and forlornly naked as they supplicated the sky and repeated their shivering forms on the snow. From classic poetry and the habit of novels, Timothy's mind, unoriginal and receptive, had consented to the idea that winter was like death—a simile he took to himself as he might have worn an old suit of his father's had family circumstances warranted the hand-me-down system of clothing younger members. So now, his eyes scanning the snow, he thought of the assembled white grains as a shroud for the numb earth over which trembling trees made their *missa solemnis* in the small clicking sounds of a primitive tongue.

Mrs. Swift lifted the speaking tube. "Turn back now, Henry." She put out her cigarette and coughed lightly—not with the finality that is expected from a casual and disconnected clearing of the throat. Timothy apprehended that the sound was a prelude for speech and that it was to him she would address herself. He shot a look at her and found her eyes already turned on him. He defended himself with a slight and courteous smile but his lips felt stiff and he thought, "Look out. Something is coming now."

She struck at once, her gaze distended upon his as

if to prevent his eyes from escaping her. "Timothy, how much longer do you intend staying in that bank?"

"I—I—until I get a little more experience, I suppose." He held his breath after he had answered, settling his muscles and feeling all his senses rise to aid him. He felt Erna's shoulder and knee, smelled Russian smoke with a keener nose, saw the gimlet pupils of Mrs. Swift as something unrelated to the rest of her cream-colored face. He tried to ease his throat and speak in an indifferent voice. "You know I'm watching out for something better. I've seen a man lately——"

"Oh, Timothy, Timothy!" Mrs. Swift's eyes left him at last to turn upward in an exasperated roll. "You'll never do anything by yourself. You're just wasting time. Why can't you see things as they are? You ought to be starting your real career—with your father. Instead you——"

She checked her words as if a thought, more important than speech, had called her away. With half-closed eyes she turned to the window and fixed them in imperative blankness on the rime that gleamed docilely under the gaze of the sun, opalescent and vitreous in the open, pearl gray in the shadows—and the hard intensity of her look spread over her face. Only her nostrils moved, round and disobedient, between breaths and Timothy was left to watch the sole sign of her agitation—her vulnerable nose.

"Mother, you'd better tell Timmy about—you know."

Mrs. Swift turned her head as if her abstraction and its cause had been tapped on the shoulder. "So I had, darling. So I had. Timothy, I was talking to your mother on the telephone this morning. She's going to bring your father some evening next week before I go away. I hope you'll talk to him as if nothing had happened. Surely if he can take the first step you can afford to——"

"Father coming to see us? But—but——"

Her quick general's smile flashed out at him. For a moment she seemed warmer, less a plotter against him now that she had disclosed her plot in the intimacy of the motor with Erna's small body pressed against them both.

"I shall be very happy, my dear boy, if I succeed in bringing about a reconciliation."

He had a brief moment of anger at the word reconciliation. It was her way of interpreting the pressure of his father's will. Patriarchal power pretending to be forgiveness. And in a helpless look at the pleasure that animated her face, Timothy saw himself being crushed between their resolutions like an insect between two palms.

"I'll be decent to father, if that's what you mean, if he'll be half-way pleasant. But he needn't expect me to knuckle under to him. I'll never do that again." He drew a free breath. "Not for anyone. I—I couldn't."

"Now, Timothy, you mustn't get the idea I'm dictating to you," said Mrs. Swift. "I only ask that you consider Erna and follow your own conscience."

A silence as cold as clay settled upon them and in its chill he grew numb in his corner. My conscience. She means father's money. Am I wrong about everything? No one in the world thinks I'm right. He gazed at the two profiles, Mrs. Swift's against the glass, Erna's lying against her mother's dark furs, searching for a resemblance to justify the intimacy of their flesh. There was none to be seen. The mother had kept her purposiveness of line and had passed on to her daughter only the soft complacencies for which she had no need. Yet however hard Mrs. Swift appeared, he found himself unable to dislike her, simply because her love for Erna was as cardinal as his own.

She had not yet finished with his conscience. Her eyes, a bright cautious gray, seemed to be studying the cut and fit of it, holding it up to the light as if it were inanimatedly draped upon a padded hanger waiting for her to decide if it were to go back to the tailor's for alterations.

"I daresay your father won't see any reason for you to go on working in that bank for nothing a month," she said tentatively.

Timothy felt himself snap shut, deprived of speech and motion. His teeth set themselves edge to edge in their old habit.

"Especially now that you're married and have responsibilities," Mrs. Swift went on.

Her voice droned in his ears, weaker and further away with each word. All at once he felt a jerking in his legs and arms. They struggled as if tied with cords for their freedom. In a desperate muscular decision he was loose and on his feet, knocking against the glass and crying, "Stop, stop!"

"Timmy, Timmy!" cried Erna. "What's the matter?"

The car slowed down, ran to the edge of the roadway and stopped. He tore at the door, pushed it wide and stepped out.

"Feel sick. Must walk."

He started to run across the crisp dead grass, faster and faster, sending his heels like hammers into the frozen ground. The wind in his ears sang on one continuous note, a mournful and gentle plaint. And as he pounded up the side of a pachydermous mound he heard with his heart the voice of little Erna, sending to him her pain.

"Timmy! Tim—my!"

III

He threw himself down at last on the roots of a tree and felt his lungs suffer with each dragging breath. From the confusion of his thoughts he kept selecting the most salient and putting them aside to be docketed and referred to later in a dossier of important things for examination. They kept shining out of his mind and disappearing like stars on the ceiling of a pretentious restaurant, switched on and off by the electrical device of a proprietor who believes too much in the realism of his Venice room or the charm of his Corner in Bagdad.

Putting away the words he must use to apologize to her mother as soon as he should enter the house, he thought of May's letter and that he must send an answer before many days and that if it were earlier he would like to go to the museum and walk again among the towering new casts. I used to want that red-haired girl who sketched. Seems funny now. He saw again his old hesitancies before her burning crest of hair, and how she had sat, legs sprawling easily, perhaps covered with his father's stockings. Must I make stockings for father? Hers, forgotten for many months, brought him back to

where he sat in a lifeless park, his heels hitched under the skirts of his overcoat, panting from his run and the certainty of defeat. His mother would stand behind his father. She always had. Apologetically sometimes, but in the end the apparent laxity of her words would be stiffened by habit into a prop for her husband's decisions. He heard her voice now in the wind that had followed him with Erna's singing wail. "Don't forget to brush your teeth. Always wash your hands before you come to the table. Eat an apple. Keeps the doctor away. Run ask Hannah." The habitual tenderness of his feeling for Hannah tempered the chill of the wind for a moment. He thought how he loved her and how Mary and Agnes could never give to the Swift kitchen the same comforting personality and nourishment. There was the restraint of an acquaintanceship not yet pursued to its corners. With Hannah he knew, for instance, that she liked apple sauce and detested marmalade; that she praised the healthiness of peas and looked down on beans of all kinds; and just what look and word he might expect for any announcement he might carry into her quarters. But with Mary and Agnes who had the blackest hair in the world there was still the confusion of unfamiliarity. In fact, it didn't much matter what they liked or how they said what they had to say.

The wind, although falling a little with the fall of the sun, was still strong enough to drive tears from his eyes and set up a chattering among the

branches over him. The gossip of their stiff wooden tongues was repeated in a chorus of clacking twigs farther away on other trees which he considered of less importance than the one he had chosen. For once he hadn't time to admire and feel the strength of the living columns that had taken up their places without human consideration for line and composition, responding only to the call of the sun and the taste of the soil that gave them support and courage. His fingers were scarcely to be bent now in their thin gloves. As he pounded them on the roots of his tree, he felt all the heat of his blood concentrated in the convolutions of his brain, burning away films that had grown over them, clarifying his past,—faces, scenes, hours of dark miseries, his probings of himself, his demands for answers to all the things that could never be answered even though the elements change places in laboratories and finally show their uniformity, undressed of their disguises, as all masks and costumes torn off after a ball show everyone to be of the same flesh and face.

Pain crept from his wrists into his fingers. He left off pounding and tucked his hands under his armpits. I must decide. Now. And tonight I'll stay in Erna's room and hold her, knowing she's happy. Sham's five thousand a year. I might as well ask father for that much. If I'm going to do it at all, let him pay me as his son. She wouldn't go to Palm Beach. Her hand. Little and sweet. Yes, I'll have to do it. He's got me now. The will

of the father visited upon the children. The will of the fathers and the mothers-in-law. What Jews the Christians are, old Steinway used to say. I didn't know what he meant then. Children have no rights. I have no rights. What *are* one's rights? I know what they're not. No right to stay with her in the privacy of a dirty little flat with bugs. She didn't mind—for a while. Yes, shut up, I know I'm wrong. Only stockings are right. That night in Daly's room. The fat girl's stockings had runs up the back. Garters, she said. She had a tooth-ache and kept her hand on her face all evening. Daly said she took it off after the rest went while he made love to her. Stop and think now. Be clear for once. If I'd give Erna my life why shouldn't I make stockings for her? Be logical, at least. Not a person in the world admires me. But if I make stockings—Truth. Oh, yes, she loves me. That's truth, too. Oh, God, if I could only be a farmer! What's that, my dear, dear boy? Such a droll dear boy! He should have been a poet. That poet's lock! Well, I'll cut it off and stick to father's stockings. Can't get out. No way out now.

And because he was simple and so near his youth, he thought of Hannah's old mouse trap and how the mice ate the cheese before they found they couldn't get out, little furry things, skimming in a hurry behind their pointed noses, looking, looking for a door that wasn't there. If Hannah only could know how many he had saved! He had kept them in a

box in the garage after he had finished hating its whitewashed enmity and the air, permanently saturated with gasoline and rubber, which reminded him of the day he had been locked in until after dark for stealing his father's fountain pen. He thought now, his throat aching with the memory, of how he had screamed and screamed into the darkness, feeling behind him as he threw himself against the door, the presence of ghosts and giants, devils with pitchforks on their tails aimed at his small backsides. And from the blond bareness of the garage he saw the little boy he had been walk into the house and seat himself on the top step of the stairs to wait for supper and forgiveness. How sad the dark shiny wood of the stairs had been to him! It was there he had always fled after his nightmares, crying and shivering in terror, listening for someone to come: Hannah, perhaps, her arms as strong as a man's in those days. His mother, if she heard him sobbing and there were people, used to send Hannah up to him and he would try to smile as soon as he heard her great shoes begin their clumping on the wood. It was then his father had begun to hate him. "Try to be a little man. You blubber like a girl. Worse than May." His father had been the one to examine his school reports, calling him into the library on the first of every month to find fault with a B and pass without praise over an A as the only fit letter in the alphabet for the card of a child of his.

"Damn him, damn him!" Timothy shouted into

the wind and then looked about to see if he could have been heard by two women who were crossing the open space between the paths. He began to kick his feet and hum in a loud voice so that if they had heard they would think he had been singing to himself as he waited for some girl to keep a frosty rendezvous. But the women in their fur coats went on without turning their heads except to each other and he let his own sink down again, heavy with his thoughts. This is the end of me. I can't hold out any more. It will be worse than hell. Father will make fun of me before everyone and spit at everything I do. I'll wish I were dead a hundred times a day. Stand the gaff, Sham calls it. This is my most important year. Everything in my life depends on it. That's the terrible part and it's my own father's attitude that drives me crazy. Those dollar marks in his eyes. All the money anybody could need and he always wants more. Why can't people stop making money and enjoy what they've got? But they never do. And they call you crazy if you don't want to spend your life fighting for it. That's one of the reasons father despises me. His mouth turns down as soon as he sees me coming. He wanted a son like Thad or Sham. Hoping still that May will take to Thad. Father would even like to manage people's love affairs. Emperor Doan. Only his pride makes him willing to speak to me again. He can't stand it that his son should work for sixty dollars a month and live with his mother-in-law.

He made the heavy jointless movements of an automaton and stood finally, balancing on aching feet, sending them forward upon the stiffness of grass as numb as he. The frozen blades sent up to him small creaking sounds of protest but he looked away, over beyond the paths to the roads that were filled with the black shapes of motors and their steady lights, hundreds of them in even flight, a twentieth century caravan.

Striding over the empty space, Timothy approached the cars until he could see the misty faces of the riders, bored women with men whose blank features seemed occupied with plans for the next day, having by tea-time already put aside the restless day of inactivity as an unwelcome intrusion into a week of profit, the seventh day of which was loss and stultification. The unending line of motors, moving nose to tail with a nervous lightness out of all proportion to their bulk, seemed to Timothy a symbol of what had defeated him. And suddenly he had the sensation of seeing all these people out of their cars and in their haughty houses while he wandered past their tight fronts, his eyes on the windows that lighted their complacent and secure interiors that would not have felt secure had they suspected the wanderer outside of being a misfit of half-baked ideas, hungry and without a home, a tramp to be chased away by the servants.

He shook his shoulders loose from his neck and hurried on, shivering. Why think of myself like

that? My inferiority admitting itself again. Perhaps that's why I want to hide away in the country. Fear of not keeping up with everybody. No, it isn't that. I can be myself in the country. God, look at the people! Haven't the cities enough of them? They're always asking why people don't leave the cities and go work the land. But when someone really wants to—"Oh, that's different. We didn't mean you." My garden. My sweet little garden father took away from me because he knew I loved it. Guess he thought it was effeminate to care so much for vegetables and flowers. Hannah cried, too, but mother was glad. "The boy's own good. He'll study harder if he hasn't that distraction."

The mournful gray dusk of an expiring day seemed to descend upon him with the generosity of an anæsthetic. He breathed it deeply through the cone of his nose as he walked back toward the thin house of his mother-in-law, unrolling in his mind a cinema of the coming apologetic scene. It would begin with his going rather humbly into the library where she always sat reading her inevitable "serious" magazine before dinner. He would speak first, trying to look between her imperious eyes instead of directly into them. He would be asked to sit near her. The contest would begin. On his side he must remember that it was all for Erna's sake and that he must say nothing that would anger her or prolong their talk. She on the other hand would try to draw out his attitudes, opinions, the plans she refused to

believe he hadn't made. Her questions were often so ideographic that he suspected her of trying to apply to himself the inaccurate principles of a popular work on psychology that she kept on her night table. Following his vague and sometimes frantically elusive answers, she would press her lips together and nod, turning down her gaze as if she held her book on her knees and was referring to it for an interpretation of his words.

He crossed Park Avenue, hurrying east and facing the darkest part of the February sky. Presently he would see the house. Yes, there it was now, as cold as a church and with pale Protestant windows. The windows of the houses on either side glowed with the warm color of pagan oranges, decided by rich lampshades which Mrs. Swift thought vulgar but quite to be expected from her *nouveau-riche* neighbors. As if she isn't herself, thought Timothy and, arriving, sent up a last look at the drawing room's outer wall. As he started up the steps a shade was drawn aside and Erna slipped into an austere frame, pressing her face to the glass like a little girl who watches the street, hoping to see from the shape of the packing what someone is bringing her.

He shouted, "Erna!"

Seeing him, her mouth opened to cry a soundless "Timmy!" A round cloud of her breath spread on the pane, melting to dim her brightness.

IV

She ran to the door. "I've been so worried!"

Lifting her in his arms, he kissed her and let her go quickly, fearing that his wintry face might chill the flesh she offered him—flesh that glowed with a gentle warmth, especial and vital, that is felt only from the burn of blood under skin. "I've been in the park—nearly frozen. I sat on the ground to think things out. Come upstairs and I'll tell you."

They mounted together and he felt the gaiety of relief. She wore a pink dress from Paris, sprinkled with beads that sparkled like dew and which seemed so delicately poised on the chiffon that a shake of his arm might send them down to scatter on the stairs. Certainly the roughness of his overcoat should he brush her with his sleeve— But she flung her arm across his back and asked to be lifted around the curve of the stairs as in all other dresses.

"Sham's been telephoning you. Three times. Go call him up."

"Sham? What's he want?"

"I don't know. Perhaps a girl he wants you to meet."

"Oh, Erna, that's nothing to make a joke about.

As if I'd ever look at any other girl but you!" He lowered his head and saw she was smiling, as sure of him as he was of himself.

"And what about me? What would you do if I ——"

"You? Oh, Erna! Could you ever—Erna! Do you mean you like someone else?"

"I said—what if I did?"

Forgetting sartorial restraint, he stopped at the head of the stairs and caught her by the shoulders. "What do you mean? Who? Have you met someone——"

"What would you *do?*" Her eyes opened and showered him with excitement and anticipation, as if she were in a theatre waiting to see if an actor would shoot his unfaithful wife or forgive her.

"I don't know. I guess I'd—" His eyes filled with the shadow of his imagined agony. "I guess I'd just go somewhere and—*die,* Erna." He saw himself running, running, from a pain that could always run more swiftly than he, racing down some dark road without end until with a bursting heart he would fall into dust and grass and die with her name as his last cry. And she would not be there, being happily somewhere else, to seal his eyes, cancelling each lid with a quick blow of the stamp—the postmark on one, ERNA—and on the other, ERNA. Not called for. Send to the dead letter office.

She shook off his fingers and rubbed her shoulder. She began to laugh, turning up her face at him.

"Silly Timmy. Of course I don't. But I love to see you like that. You look so dramatic and—sort of desperate."

He couldn't return her smile but stood gulping and weak, still shivering from his fright and the cold of the park. "Erna—you shouldn't——"

"Come along. Telephone to Sham."

"Yes, dear."

"Shall I call him for you? You never remember numbers."

He followed her to the telephone, standing by her shoulder, seeing the gold head of his treasure with the relief of a man who is assured by an expert that after all his doubt the jewel he was starved to possess is genuine.

"Here's Sham, Timmy."

He took the receiver and heard Sham's voice, self-possessed, impatient. "That you, Tim?"

"Yes."

"Well, this is Mr. Roger Wickersham and I want to speak to you on a matter of business. Is the coast clear?"

"What is it, Sham?" Timothy, still confused by pain and relief, was in no mood for young pleasantries.

"Do you want to make a lot of money?"

"Money?"

"Yes, money. Want a lot?"

"Of course. What's the joke?"

"It's a wonderful chance, Tim. A tip. Wall

Street, you know. Oil. I made a thousand dollars last week. Tomorrow I'm going to clean up twenty. I thought you might like to be in on it. . . ."

"But what? How? What do I have to do?"

"Give me all you've got. I'll get it back for you with a dozen little dollars following along after every one you've put in."

"But, Sham. I haven't any money."

"For Pete's sake, Tim, have you spent all your grandfather's money already?"

Timothy stared into the black mouth of the telephone. "Oh, I couldn't touch that, Sham."

"The hell you couldn't! Why couldn't you? Don't be a fool, Tim. You'll never have a chance like this again. And if you want to be independent——"

Independent! He closed his eyes, seeing his father's offices with their shining desks and doors, their bright rich rugs, the hundred hirelings who sighed in furtive gratitude after "the old man" had passed.

"Sham, are you sure? What if——"

"Say, Tim, I'm not going to coax you. If you don't want to, say so. I might have known——"

"No, wait. Wait a minute." He laid his throbbing forehead against the disk, pressing into it a circle of his fevered flesh. What if he could appear before them all, a fortune like a buttress behind him against which they would see the futility of pushing and decide instead to praise its architecture?

"Well, he's not such a dub as I thought," his father would say. "Well, whoever would have thought that Timothy—" his mother would begin in one of her incomplete comments. And Erna's face, lighted with love and pride——

"I'll have to have it tomorrow."

Sham's voice startled him and he replied in trembling tones, "All right. At your office, Sham?"

"That's it."

He put up the receiver slowly and its click sounded as loud and irrevocable as a bell. He jumped away from the table and turned. Erna was not there. As he passed her door she called to him.

"Come here and tell me what you thought in the park."

He stood in her door, his body aching with the shivering that shook him. "I'm going to lie down, I guess, dear. I have an awful headache."

"Timmy! Oh, I'm sorry. Shall I come up?"

"Please don't, darling. Let me sleep. I don't want any dinner."

"No dinner?"

He started away. "No. I just want to rest."

Her protests ran after him as he hurried up the stairs. He locked his door and, going to his desk, brought out his bankbook and papers, studying them as they shook in his hands in the circle of light from the desk lamp. Adages from his childhood's copy-books popped into his head. "Nothing ventured, nothing won." And "Faint heart never—"

With pencil and an old envelope he began multiplying. Times twelve——

Erna came to the door and stood there, knocking gently and listening. "Timmy, are you asleep?"

He heard her stirring and almost imagined the sound of her breath on the wood. Presently her steps went toward the stairs, touching the floor with soft reluctance.

He threw out his hand in a movement of love and longing. Oh, Erna! It's for you darling! I must risk all—He stopped and a memory of words arranged as those he had just so nearly spoken gathered itself from darkness and leaped from his hidden thought to the page of a book. I must dare all since one so poor—What could it be? Something he had read of beauty in the days he had seemed to exist only for the books he sought, burrowing into their pages, becoming small and detached, closing the covers after him and living his real life in a shelter of leather and paper—in golden Greece, in Rome, in France following the growing glory of its kings, in England with Robin Hood and the plain Oliver Cromwell.

I must dare all since one so poor—He frowned, shook his head and gripped his pencil again. Twelve times. Why, good God, that would be——

V

By half-past eight the marvel of his totals had begun to seem an indispensable part of his future. He accepted them and became calmer. Also he was hungry. He put down the book he had been holding and in which he had forgotten to read, and went down the back stairs to the kitchen. The family would be at dessert now, or having coffee in the drawing room. Were there guests tonight? Yes, some cousins, dull and elderly, had been expected from Mount Vernon for their biannual glimpse into the envied *ménage* of their smart New York relatives. Yes, Sunday would be the day fixed by Mrs. Swift for their pilgrimage, since on that night their hostess could not be asked to lead them forth, a colorless *cortège* with their faces still shadowed with the piety of a Mount Vernon sermon, to exhibit them at opera or play. In any case, there would be time for his dinner before Erna would again climb the stairs. He would sit at the big table near the window where later Mary and Agnes would come with their own plates, and while he ate he would listen to their talk and the homely sounds of crockery, water flowing and checked off with a jerk of

the spigot. He would feel the pleasant heat of the kitchen and smell food with the health of his appetite, the odor of good food in a scrupulous kitchen, hot and moist, new from the fire.

But when he went in with a smile of trust in his welcome, he saw that Mary was frowning and that Agnes bent her head to hide the tears that had wet her face. Hesitating, he went slowly to the table and sat down. "I'm not in your way here, am I?"

"No, Mr. Doan." Mary bent over a dish, a wooden spoon in her hand. "Didn't you go to your dinner tonight? Mr. Lyman said——"

"I had a headache." He glanced at Agnes, standing before a series of small dishes over which she curved her shoulders. He saw only the rebellious lines of her profile and over it in her thinness the transparent skin seemed drawn taut. And making her face even whiter and smaller the cloudy crown of her black hair, inclining back and high from her head, seemed laid on with the lightness of shredded feathers. "Are there guests tonight?"

Mary nodded, compressing her cheeks. "Four extra." She laid down her spoon and crossed the kitchen, holding her arms close to her sides in the gait that is common to workers in cramped spaces. She raised her old lids and jerked her head toward Agnes. "She was to be meeting her mother at the train. Not a word she couldn't have her night till they all came in from driving. The Lord knows what my poor sister'll do when she steps out

into that station, never having been in a big city before."

Agnes lifted a dish and set it down again. She began to sob. "Her being sick is the worst—and looking everywhere for me—and if I was two I couldn't get the silver done in time."

Timothy stared at her twisted mouth that moved in trembling jerks as if it was the red flesh itself quivering under his eyes that felt her pain. "But, Agnes—why didn't you tell Mrs. Swift?"

"I told her."

"Oh!" He got up, puzzled and distressed. "You're sure she understood? Agnes, are you sure?"

"What would it be to her?"

Timothy, staring still, saw her turn on him, her resentment replacing the shy words she usually gave him in the kitchen, as if in her trouble she were identifying him with Mrs. Swift and the four extra guests who must be fed and polished for afterward while a sick old woman from the country stood chilled and frightened in the cavern of the Grand Central Station.

"Agnes—I say—what time does her train get in?"

She lifted swollen lids to the clock. "It'll be coming in twenty minutes."

"Run for your things. Hurry. Take a taxicab. Here." He brought out a bill from his pocket. "Quick, Agnes."

She stared at him, dumb and overwhelmed. The little time left her and the incitement of his voice seemed to deprive her of the power to accept a sudden release.

"She can't do it, Mr. Doan," said Mary. "There's the work."

"Nothing I can't do for her," Timothy said. "I've helped Hannah hundreds of times." He moved closer to Agnes. "Hurry. You'll be late."

As she seemed unable to move, he pulled her hand and at his touch her sagging white face caught itself up in a smile that seemed to turn her to silver. Eyes, skin and smile flashed before him like a pale metal. He thought, "That's the first time I ever saw her smile." He felt her hand jerk closed on his and, as if it were the same impulse of muscle, she ran across the kitchen and through the door.

"You see, Mary," he said at once, "it takes a man to manage things." With his words a thought entered him as if he were drinking it slowly. I'm a man of affairs now. In two days everyone will be looking up to me. And he began repeating to himself Sham's promise and the last multiplication table. "Now let me at that silver, Mary."

While he dried and rubbed, his dark lock falling over his eyes, he felt already expanded and honored. The tall young man who was cleaning platters and spoons would soon give Erna a charming apartment in town and a little house, perhaps in Connecticut, not more than an hour or so from New York.

They would spend their week-ends under a rustic sky and he could have a garden to work in while she sat within his sight reading and often raising her head to send him a smile and ask if the sun weren't getting too hot. Their friends would drive out to see them, walk over the lawn, and perhaps stop to praise his garden, no longer looking at him with a puzzled and patronizing gaze that always seemed to say, "No use trying to solve Timothy. He's not quite all there." Instead they would ask, "How did you do it, Timothy? Why, you made a fortune in a few days, didn't you? We never dreamed you had any business sense." Life would be very different soon.

And rubbing the silver until it brightened the room, he began to plan out the garden. For spring, radishes. They came up so quickly in neat little rows and were so red and belly-like as they were pulled up out of the earth that they gave pleasure by their color, whether they were edible or merely small ornaments whose sight was a satisfaction. And they were so unvaryingly responsive. They *always* came up. And there would be lima beans with their opulent green bushes of a jasper color that made the garden look as if it really were up to something. Hard to shell. Work for Hannah. And he would have peas for the delicacy of their crisp vines, clinging to cherry twigs cut to support them and about which they wound their spiral tendrils, as tight as a grape vine. And the feathery weediness of carrots

with their yellow roots, sometimes male and biped, somnolent in the ground. Magenta beets with magenta-veined tops, glossy and succulent. Lettuce that grew auburn and milky under the sun, autumnal to the eye even in hot June, and bitter and lactic to the palate unless nursed under the shade of glass. Bees, deserting these simple pods and roots, would shoot like black stinging bullets to the brighter herbaceous stench of marigolds, the succeeding carnal changes of purpling and fading flesh of zinnia, the tall domestic disk of hollyhocks—high as humans and rising from gross and hairy leaves. Over they would fly, and Timothy with them, to the scaly, squat-branched lavender bush, to whose colored scent all insects were drawn before its dried bloom should finally perfume mere household linen. Sometimes he would be sure to come upon beetles, still mating as they were disturbed underground, and he might even trap a mole at the end of one of its catacombs. And of course in his garden there would be a toad. No garden could be any good without a toad—one that would come out at dusk and work concentratedly until bedtime. He remembered the toad he had teased in the garden his father had taken from him—a celibate toad that lived down the drain pipe. Every day when watering the garden he had turned the hose into the drain to float up his toad, watching it come up with stupid eyes that blinked reproaches at him for being disturbed at the early hour of four o'clock. It would rush away, then, with an awk-

ward hop or two and squat not far away, waiting for its house to dry. But it never tried to find another where no diurnal flood would come to disturb its dreams of flies and gnats.

"A penny, Mr. Doan." Mary touched his elbow. "You'll be rubbing the trimming off the edge of that if you're not careful."

He straightened the ache from his back and stretched out his arm. "I was thinking of a toad I used to play with, Mary."

"A toad!" Mary's face, the color of his magenta beets, took on an expression of disgust. Her hands drew themselves back and rushed under her apron as if to protect them from a small animal long since dead in the place where Timothy's garden had flourished. "Nasty things. You get warts off them."

"Well, I didn't." He began to laugh. "Don't look like that, Mary. Anybody'd think to look at you that I'd carried one in here."

Mary brought out her hands again, swollen and burnt from heat of water and fire. "You're a funny young man. Sure you're not much like the rest of the family." She stopped and raised her hand. "Ssssh!"

Someone was coming through the passage toward the door. Timothy's smile was wiped from his face by the thought of Mrs. Swift on an errand that would reveal him a conspirator against her discipline. For a moment he felt the impulse to run to

the china closet and close the door against her anger, as he had run to hide from his father when he was a little boy.

Then the door opened and Lyman appeared, stout, surprised into lifting his eyebrows at the sight of Timothy, coatless, and standing before an array of silver. He announced, "Agnes is wanted," and looked away from Timothy as if he recognized an embarrassment he couldn't understand and was too polite to inquire into, having served in families where nearly everything had happened that shouldn't and without reproof from the servants.

Mary and Timothy turned their eyes upon each other's faces. Then both sent Lyman imploring gazes, casting themselves upon his ingenuity.

"I told her she could go out," said Timothy, beginning to feel uneasy. "Isn't it something you can do?"

The butler ignored this appeal and with a look judged them guilty without trial. "And what am I to say to madame?" He spoke less to Timothy than at his mussed shirt, the sleeves rolled up to the elbows, as he had worn them when he worked in his garden.

Lyman's refusal to co-operate, or even feel that he should, called up anger and courage in Timothy. He looked at the jowls that were drawn down with impudent dignity. "Say to Mrs. Swift that Agnes went out with my permission. Can you remember that?"

Lyman, flicked, turned down his eyes and bowed. Turning, he marched out with steps that were doubtless intended to be stately and indifferent to any rebuke from an unauthorized source.

"Oh, Mr. Doan. He'll tell her," said Mary in one breath. "He's that disagreeable you can't think."

Timothy began to breathe quickly. "That's all right, Mary. I'll take the blame. Don't worry."

The silver finished, he would in other circumstances have been washing his hands and buttoning his cuffs. But it seemed to him now that it would be an act of hypocrisy to withhold details, even though they would be likely to increase her displeasure. He stood panting and silent, timing Lyman's arrival at the drawing room, his supercilious delivery of the message, Mrs. Swift's attack on the kitchen. When he judged it time for her to come, he began to listen for the door at the end of the passage, planning what he would say, hoping to protect Mary and to save Agnes from a fault of irregularity that was his only. The clock ticked, loud and triumphant, over his head. Mary was standing in a pose of resignation. Her lips moved. He thought she might be praying.

"Don't worry, Mary. I'll talk to her. She couldn't have understood how important it was. Especially as——"

Footsteps at last. Slow feet, not the nervous steps of Mrs. Swift. Lyman again. He came in

like a butler of the stage whose every entrance and gesture has been rehearsed for weeks by a producer whose passion was for detail.

"Madame said, 'Very well,' and would Mr. Doan come to her in the library when it's convenient?"

Timothy glanced at Mary, who began to move toward the stove's comfort with small steps of relief, seeming to take for granted a gentle settlement among shelves of books. He relaxed and, going to the sink, began to scrub his hands red with a brush. He fastened his cuffs with uncertain fingers and drew on his coat, relieved, when he turned, to see that Lyman had gone.

"Well, Mary!" His voice stuck in his throat and he forced it out, too loudly. "I told you it would be all right."

"Luck for once," said Mary. "And thanks, Mr. Doan. You've got a good heart." Her chapped old hands drew pots across the stove as she hurried out of the kitchen.

The cousins from Mount Vernon had apparently left for an early train, for Mrs. Swift sat in the library alone, cutting the pages of one of her magazines. She looked up as Timothy stood in the door and gazed at him from eyes that were small and cold over cheek bones stained with red.

"Timothy. I wish to speak to you."

"Yes."

So she was angry after all and there was going to be a scene in which his defence would be the

obvious one of kindness, offered as if it were an argument of rare but untenable value. He studied her face, thinking it was the first time he had seen her flushed from her cream-colored calm, and then trying to understand, fairly, what was passing back of her eyes that should contract them with that bitter and pointed rage. Why were there so many people he couldn't understand? He had often gone over features one by one, trying to discover hearts from faces, as one gazes at the great stone image of a strange anterior god, bearded with the mirthless smile of a forgotten purpose, trying to reconstruct under granite eyes that have forgotten nothing, the entire civilization of a dark and mysterious country.

Mrs. Swift motioned to a chair and bolted him fast to it with her lifted finger. "I don't like what you did tonight, Timothy. You mustn't interfere with the way I run my house."

"I know. But I thought you hadn't understood. And there was only twenty minutes before the train ——"

"I understood perfectly. If there had been a good reason, Agnes could have gone."

"But her mother——"

"Could have found a taxicab and given the address. Why didn't her son meet her? Agnes has a brother here, you know."

"I—I don't know."

Her look lifted in victory. "You see? Servants are never truthful. And you, of course, occupied

with your windmills, don't understand when they are taking advantage. I would rather you didn't spend so much time in the kitchen, Timothy. It isn't very dignified for a person of your position."

He was silent, burning and shamed, thinking—what position? He felt she had finished, yet he couldn't move. Her cheeks still wore the color of excitement—so strange, he thought, for her methodical face. Was she waiting for an apology?

"I—I'm sorry. It was entirely my fault."

"Um. Not entirely."

His eyes opened on her. "Oh, you won't blame Agnes!"

"Blame Agnes?" Her eyebrows lifted and her nostrils flared out. "But naturally. She was told not to go out. She went. Now she can find another house where she can break rules with——"

"Oh, please, please!" Timothy jumped from the edge of his chair. "That wouldn't be fair when I told her I would be responsible. Don't you see ——"

"I see you appear unaccountably interested in a servant." She gave him an intense examination, then shrugged her shoulders as if to shake off his dark imploring eyes. Her hand lifted the magazine and placed it between their faces. The interview was over.

Timothy rushed from the room. He ran up the stairs to Erna's door. "Erna! Oh, Erna!"

She came across the room in her clinging pink dress. "What is it, Timmy?"

"Listen—you must—" He stopped, panting, and seized her hand. "Agnes had to meet her mother. I told her she could go. And now your mother is going to send her away. It was my fault. Oh, Erna, go talk to your mother. Don't let her. Will you do that for me? It isn't right—when it was my fault——"

"Heavens, Timmy! don't be so *excited*. No one's going to die." She went to her dressing table. "My *word!* when you rushed in here like that I thought ——"

"But you will, Erna? Will you?"

She took up her comb and ran it slowly through her hair, patting down the sides and smoothing the nape of her neck. "Of course. If you want me to. But what were you doing in the kitchen?"

"I've always gone to the kitchen, Erna, for things. All my life. But your mother says——"

"She thinks it's funny you're so crazy about the kitchen. But I said, 'Timmy's not a bit like other people. You can't expect him——'"

"Darling, will you please go down and talk to her? She'll do anything for you. Say you like Agnes and don't want her to leave. Go *now*, Erna."

Erna got up, yawning and patting her small pink mouth with her palm. "All right. Calm down. Oh, dear, sometimes I wish you were just a little like other people!"

She went out of the door and he watched her, her first reproach repeating itself in his ears. Like other people! Wouldn't anyone have done the same? His mother would—probably. Not his father, of course. May would. And Sham. What did Erna mean, then, by wishing he were like other people?

He crossed the rug to her dressing table and sat down. There were her bottles and a silver toilet set, marked E.S. A silver picture frame with his own face looking back at him with deep-set and melancholy gaze. Two rings and an amber chain of beads. A square of jade. Powder and a chamois skin for rubbing it. Cuff links of turquoise for her riding habit. A little crystal horse with neck and tail arched up to catch the light. A box of peppermints. (He took one.) A cigarette case. A jewel box of lizard skin, grass green. A safety pin. An atomizer of green glass. A book of Picasso's drawings. A twisted note in Sham's writing. Probably asking her to dance, he thought.

Lifting the comb she had passed through her short furry hair, he detached from it a fine bright filament like a metal thread. He drew it between his fingers and twined it around his thumb. How lovely she was, confiding, pink and soft! Round and firm like a little tree. And to think that if she hadn't been a friend of May's staying at his house they might never have fallen in love. She might have married Sham, then. He kissed the

clinging hair on his thumb. Mine forever. My wonderful beautiful little wife.

He heard her coming up the stairs, light bright silver feet, always on their toes. "Did you, Erna? Is it——"

"Of course." She came in a rush and threw herself into his arms. "Silly Timmy. Now tell me what you thought about in the park today."

"I—I've forgotten."

"Oh, oh, what a lie! Why, you couldn't have!"

"Anyway, I can't tell you. Not for two days. It's a secret." He laughed and squeezed her ribs with his arms until she gasped. "You'll like it, though."

"Will I? What *is* it?"

"Well, it isn't exactly what I thought of today but it's something else that happened later which is the reason I can't tell you what I thought of in the park. Do you see?"

Struggling, she pushed his arms down against her sides. "No, I don't. That's the silliest explanation I ever heard in my life."

"Well, you'll have to wait just the same, darling. It's like Christmas presents."

"Oh, is it? Well, all right. No wonder mother says you wind me about your little finger."

"Did she say that?"

"Yes. So did father."

"Why?"

She settled her weight down on his knees. "Oh, because I don't make you leave the bank—and because I won't let you stay alone while I go to Palm Beach—those are the principal things."

The excitement of his secret was bright in his eyes. "You just wait, Erna. It won't be long before I show them all something!"

He drew her head down to his and kissed her, pressing on her lips the belief in himself and his exultant pride in it, which had burst over him at last like a star rocket at night that illumines a field, dry and sad.

VI

Mrs. Swift in black velvet and pearls accepted her coffee from Lyman and returned to immobility. Only her eyes moved, excited and febrile, from cup to door, winking, turning—eyes that listened with her ears for the sound of a bell. Mr. Swift, on the edge of a chair, wore his English dinner clothes and over the collar his Adam's apple, pink and prominent, trembled like the fist of a nervous baby. Erna, too, listened for the bell but her interest seemed blended with duty—a look she might have worn in her Roman history class the day she learned how Brutus stabbed Cæsar.

Timothy, glancing from face to face, squirmed in his chair. Why couldn't they talk naturally—or at least drink their coffee? He took his at a gulp and sat holding the empty cup. He coughed and looked at Erna. Did he dare to suggest they turn on the phonograph and dance? At the sound in his throat, she glanced at him but before he could make her a sign she had dropped her head and now bent over, frowning at the tip of her silver shoe. Mr. Swift, too, stirred at the cough. He stretched his

legs in momentary relaxation and lifted one knee over the other before resuming his rigid expression of unpleasant inaction.

Tightening his fingers on his saucer, Timothy leaned back. He was listening with the others but not for the bell that would announce the arrival of his father and mother. His ears were sharpened for another bell, smaller and more important—the bell of the telephone and then Sham's voice somewhere breaking into a network of wires. "You're made, Tim. Come tomorrow and collect. Pip-ip."

His foot perked forward and his lips twitched. Why the devil didn't Sham telephone? Seven o'clock he had said. Perhaps he had better call him. He made the round of the three faces with his eyes and thought of the waiting room of a hospital. Then getting to his feet, he addressed timidly the regal velvet and pearls of Mrs. Swift.

"I'm going to telephone."

She caught at him with her glance and he went out of the room accompanied by all their eyes. Good heavens! anybody'd think I had to have permission to leave—like school or the bank. She has to know everything. Even her own husband can't —He gave the number and his ears expanded from his head as they waited, filling the room, the city, all space.

The butler answered. "Mr. Roger's not come in. Yes, sir, I'll tell him."

Timothy put down the receiver and sat holding

the telephone in his arms, swaying from side to side with it, as if it might awake and cry. That's funny. Just like Sham to forget. Probably went to dinner with a girl and left it to stew. I suppose I can tell them anyway, though I'd rather wait for the official word. Still if he doesn't call up before father leaves——

Resting his head on the disk, he closed his eyes to see his father's face, discrediting the first news of his son's achievement, then breaking the severe lines to smile. "A chip of the old block, eh, Swift?" Timothy's shoulder stirred, anticipating a great clap from his father's hand. And his mother, hanging to his arm and repeating, "Tell us about it, Timmy. I want to write the whole story to May." He smiled into the disk at his cheek. Tonight he would be the most important member of his family at last—the calling to Broadway for a star rôle an actor who had spent his novitiate in the provinces, playing while he dreamed of fame character parts with padded vests, putty noses and accents from Germany, Ireland and Jerusalem.

"Timmy! Didn't you hear them come?"

"No—I didn't." He jumped up, turning to Erna, his heart busy in his throat. She put out her hand and he took it, small and cold, in his. Her face was lighted as if for a party with candles and a cake and presents in tissue paper marked "For a good little girl." In her blue and silver dress she had a happy and rewarded look that polished her from

bright hair to silver shoes. He pulled her up to kiss her, as excited as she and almost transported. If he only had Sham's assurance this would be the first completely ecstatic moment of his life.

He threw one last glance over his shoulder at the dark silent instrument before he followed Erna down the hall to the door of the drawing room. But at the sight of his imposing father, standing feet apart and looking beyond what his gaze beheld, Timothy began to crumple from habit. As if caught in a fault, he came forward into the reviewing eyes of the waiting families.

"Well, Timothy." His mother, vague and weakly affectionate, kissed him, saying as she passed him along to his father, "Aren't you looking a little pale?"

"How are you, Father?"

Mr. Doan put out his hand slowly and enclosed Timothy's. He shook it with restraint, his grassy eyebrows moving up as he focused his capitalistic eyes on his son. "Well, young man. Well."

The words left his heavy mouth uneasily and as they faced each other, their arms moving up and down in conventional cordiality, their last violent meeting seemed to gather about them in a cloud, concentrate its force and strike the air between them like a thunderbolt. Their fingers jerked apart and each stepped back.

Timothy, confronted with memories of pain, felt everything between the bars of his ribs drop sud-

denly as if cut away by a knife. Standing before his father, he gave him and the room the sickliness of a smile that one might summon upon meeting in the street of a foreign city, in the midst of a Cook's procession, childhood neighbors, looking uncomformable in their new surroundings, and who, after the silence had hardened, break it to say, "Did you hear how old man Peters left all his money to his adopted daughter? You remember him. They lived just down the street from you." And you think, "What street? My God, what town?" You see through the broken thousands of wheels that have turned to keep you away from childhood for twenty years a whitened canvas of a community covered with prejudiced dust which you fancy lies on the hats and shoulders of these apparitions before you, although they assure you that they collected it in their drive in the Juggernaut of *Tourisme*. And while the scars of your youth open again to weep blood, you turn away a face stiff with pain and say a meeting will be impossible, as you are leaving the next day—no that night—for Syria. And all that day, and the day that follows, your wounds drip and an old miasmic fever searches your bones. Anguish, bitterness, humiliation. Was that really you—that wretched child—ugly, unpleasant, persecuted?

A touch on his shoulder and his mother was looking up into his face. "Let's find a corner, dear, shall we?"

He nodded, swallowing back everything but the consciousness of the room, a place to seat his mother, the hope of being called to the telephone. Then in chairs, drawn edge to edge as if to push intimacy upon two timid strangers, they looked into each other's faces, mother and son, with everything between them that can be crowded into inches of air separating more importantly than mere space that divides far north from distant south—age and sex. He held his dark face, usually in rebellion but now softly questioning, steadily to the diluted love in hers, dark like her son's but resigned to the encroachments of life and marriage—detached from the importance of animal functions. Maternity with her seemed unconnected with parturition—the expelling of blood and a plump little sack of bones, later to be clamped at her breast with a hunger that would surpass that of the feeding child. She sat quietly in black lace, a little uncomfortable, he knew, in Mrs. Swift's drawing room, perhaps thinking, while she waited for domestic adjustments, of her own line of Quakers and Pilgrim Fathers, obscure but at least old and of Eastern America, revived now and again to her mind by bulletins from the Daughters of the Revolution and the Colonial Dames, founded before Mrs. Swift's forebears had abandoned their Norwegian towns to settle into the flour districts of Minnesota.

"How is Hannah, Mother?"

"Just the same. Of course, she grows older."

Mrs. Doan smiled faintly and dismissed Hannah with a flutter of her uncompromising linen handkerchief, white and edged with Valenciennes. Ladies of her acquaintance may have sighed upon passing counters of red, black, and gold squares of silk and chiffon, but they never bought them. White linen edged with modest lace for the descendants of early settlers on the bulletin list of patriotic societies.

"And the dogs?"

"All quite well, I think. But I'm not hearing about you."

"Oh, I'm all right, Mother. Nothing to tell about myself—yet! That is——"

"What, dear? Have you something to tell me?"

"Not just now, Mother. Perhaps later—before you go."

"Timmy!" She came forward at him. "But why haven't I guessed it for myself? Oh, my dear, I'm so glad! It's just what you need to make you settle down. May I speak to Erna about it? Or would you rather that I——"

"But what do you mean? What has Erna to do with—" All at once her meaning seemed to speak from her eyes. He bent his head and said, "No. It's not that." He began to blush.

"Oh! I thought— Well, lots of time," Mrs. Doan said. "You're both babies yourselves. I'd as soon fancy May with a family as you and Erna."

"Mother." He waited for her eyes to attend him. "Don't you see I'm not a child any more? I mean,

can't you see I've changed a lot—grown older—since I left home? You must admit I'm—well, at least adult. I feel ten years older than the night I packed my things and you came up the back stairs to say good-bye to me so father wouldn't hear."

Mrs. Doan's head twisted to look at the chair that held her husband, seated massively while he listened to Mrs. Swift's solution for the taxation woes of big business. "Sssssh, Timmy. No use stirring him up again now that he's come around." She beckoned him nearer and whispered, "He's going to take you into the business. Don't say a word till he tells you himself. And a house for you and Erna near us. He's going to pretend to invest your grandfather's money for you so you'll think you're doing everything for yourself. We selected the house the other day. It's——"

"But, Mother!" Timothy caught her hand. "No—wait—first I'll tell you my surprise. I've already invested grandfather's money—and made a fortune!"

"Timmy!" She gasped and her body sank back and settled into the arbitrary lines of her chair. Her dark face turned pink under the gentle premature white of her hair, flushing with pleasure and the anticipation of family excitement. "*Timmy*, you *have? Did* you, Timmy?"

Mr. Doan creaked his chair half way about, a violent punctuation of Mrs. Swift's editorial. "Did he what, Dollie?"

Hearing the word "Dollie," a household signal that his father wanted to be rescued from a bore, Timothy seized this moment. He sprang to his feet and his eyes drove at his father like weapons that had been waiting their proper tempering for many years. "I've just made a lot of money on Wall Street, Father."

Every face in the room froze into attention as if Timothy had been a photographer shouting, "Ready!" before touching off a flashlight. Only Mrs. Doan, whose knowledge was a minute older, preened her black lace in the chair beside Timothy, her face lifted to him in a proud, warm smile.

Mr. Doan was the first to recover speech and sink surprise into a judicial voice. "Well, well, what's this? Wall Street, you say? What did you do down there, young man?"

"I told you. I made a lot of money."

"In what?"

"Oil." Timothy plunged his hands into his pockets and tried not to let his triumphant voice tell them how his stature had mounted in the room.

"Is that so?" inquired Mr. Doan. "When?"

"Yesterday."

"Yesterday? *Yesterday?*" Mr. Doan's eyebrows pulled together, a bushy ledge across his forehead. "I don't get you. You'd better explain. That oil stock yesterday—why, the whole town's talking about it. Say—how much did you make?"

Timothy stared at him. He gulped and stam-

mered out, "I—I don't know yet—the exact figures. I'm waiting now——"

As if it were a cue, Lyman's heavy figure filled the door. "Mr. Doan—young Mr. Doan—is asked for on the telephone."

"Excuse me," Timothy shouted. "There he is now to tell me how much—I'll be right back."

He ran from the room to the library and clutched the receiver. Still shouting, he began, "Sham! Tell me how much! Quick! Father's here and I've just told him. Hurry, Sham!"

"Tim—listen."

Timothy pressed the receiver closer to his ear. Was that Sham's voice? It sounded shrunken, sick, as distant as if it were being sent to him across a field from between Sham's hands.

"What's the matter? Talk louder. I can't hear ——"

"Say, Tim, I've got to see you. Can you come up?"

"To your house? Oh, I can't. You keep the money till tomorrow. I just want to know how much."

"Tim. You—we—you'd better come up."

"I *can't,* Sham. How much?"

A sound of breath from Sham and a long silence. Then, "It's just awful, Tim. We lost."

Timothy blinked at the polished wood of the table. His eyes wanted to close and his mouth spread into a grin, his distorted lips spreading stiffly away from

his teeth. "Oh, quit. This is important. They're waiting—" His voice stopped with a dry gurgle.

"I wish to God I'd never thought of it. I only wanted to help you along, Tim. We knew for a fact that a half a million shares were to be dumped on the market, but the promoter managed to get an option on them and keep them off. They began to bull the stock. Everybody was short and started to cover. It went higher——"

"Sham!" Timothy pounded the telephone against the table. "I don't know what you're talking about! Do you mean—I've lost the money?"

"You're not the only one. All of us did. For Pete's sake, don't you think I feel bad enough? Are you going to rub it in? Say, be a sport, Tim. Anyhow you should worry with all the money your old man has——"

Timothy's hand dropped to his knee. Still grinning, he felt the telephone slip from his hands and heard the smash it made when it struck the floor. His head fell and his chin touched his chest. He clenched his hands, pounding them on his knees and muttering, "Oh, God! Oh, God!" His ears sang and buzzed as if filled with water.

"Timmy!"

The flute of Erna's voice, high and frightened, pierced him. He tried to lift his head but all his force concentrated in his fists that rose again and again to strike thighs as insensible as his hands.

"Did you lose all of it, darling? I was listening.

Poor Timmy! Oh, your father will be— And mother will begin again——"

"Don't care—not a—damn—for any of them!" All at once he began to cry and his chest was convulsed with the movements of his sobs. Through the noise of his breathing, he sent his words as if he were running against a wind. "Everything—like—that—all my—life. Nothing I do—is right—ever. Guess I—was born—oh—to be—cursed!"

Erna began to cry, too, her head touching his neck. "Never mind. Oh, Timmy, don't. Don't let your father see——"

He held his breath at the thought of his father's contempt. Be a man. Worse than your sister. The breath he was holding escaped in an explosion. He must stop. Coward. Wait till your father sees your face! Weakling! "Erna. Come, darling. Here's my handkerchief. Dry your eyes. We'll have to go in, I guess."

"Yes, Timmy." She drew her cheek across his.

He arose on legs of paper, his arm about her neck. Its white slenderness gleamed in the lights and he touched the flesh with his finger as they went along with wavering small steps. The air felt cold and he laid his arm around her waist to press warmth and love. I'll pretend it's a dream and that soon I'll be waking up in bed with the money in an envelope under my pillow.

VII

The room seemed packed with waiting faces of pale strained skin and eyes that hurt him like probes in his flesh. Dream faces, misty and staring like memories. They were all dead. Or was he dead after a life he could not remember, having long since buried their consanguineous bones and forgiven their sins? But for his, old and unexpiated, he had come back among them, perhaps in his sleep, and must serve them with the tender thoughts he should have fixed to them in life, these ghosts with questioning faces, and make up to them in a dream for the years of his indifference. His mother first—Children always love your mother. He moved his fingers toward her, dizzy hands pressing through heavy air. His head dropped, turning, turning——

Erna pulled at his arm. "Sit down, Timmy."

He felt a chair rise beneath him. There. He wasn't going to faint after all. He could feel his hands and feet now, weights with nerves that trembled, awakening to torture him again. Setting his head high, he dared to look at his father.

Mr. Doan moved. "Out with it, Timothy. What's the good news?"

"Isn't any." He heard a laugh squeak in his throat with an adolescent sound. "Sham says—I don't understand what happened—" He cleared his throat. "It's all gone, Father."

Mr. Doan's face advanced, changing its lines in scale-like gradations, color crawling into it, modulations continuing to travel over his large countenance, expanding its features, filling it with blood and fury. Then at the climax of this strange and terrifying growth, his lips shot out into rigid ledges and he made a sound like a bark.

As if he were watching a cinema slowed down to display each muscular reaction, Timothy sat, one of a small audience, slightly surprised at the revelation of this motion but feeling no connection with its fleshly reality. While he gazed the process began again, reversed itself through turkey red, the paler flame of coral, a fading flush and then settled into the foundation color of dark flesh, a little sunken now after its fiery functionings.

"Well, well," he said in a crisp conversational voice. "So you gambled away your nest-egg. Huh!" He got out of his chair, lightly for a man of his usual heavy motions. "Not that I'm surprised. Come, my dear, we must be going." He nodded to his wife. "No, Timothy, the only thing that surprises me is that you didn't do it long ago."

Mrs. Swift sprang up. "But, my dear Mr. Doan! You're not going already!"

Turning, he gave her a smile, forced and false.

"Yes, we must get our beauty sleep. We're not young folks any more."

"But—but—" She brought down her hand on her black velvet thigh in a violent jerk of protest and desperate haste. "But nothing's been settled!"

"What is there to settle?" His lips, hard and drawn, made a bitter arc in his face, frozen now into contempt that was open and malicious.

"Everything. Timothy—his future——"

"That!" He repudiated it with his shoulders and went on to the door.

"Yes, that!" called Mrs. Swift. "What are you going to do with him? When are you going to take him into your office?"

Mr. Doan stopped in the door, looking back at his son as if he were a damaged bale of cotton for which he had just refused to pay. "Never," he said. "Never. I've got fools enough in my business already."

Lyman stood waiting in the hall with coats, stoutly servile, and with the look in his face of one who has listened, cunning and unshamed, with the custom of servants long since upon him. Timothy heard the door close and the large feet of Lyman retire. Then the purr of an engine making ready for the ride to Long Island through open miles that would be trekked by tears from his mother's tamed eyes and ejaculations of contempt from the acrimonious mouth of his father, tasting the bitterness of his defeated paternity.

Mrs. Swift motioned her husband to his feet. "Go upstairs. I want to talk to you. Erna. Come with mother, darling."

Erna stood apart, her face in her hands, frozen in her cold blue dress into a posture of premature despair, like a child stood in a corner for the fault of another. "No. I want to——"

"Mother wants you to come with her, darling." Mrs. Swift's purposeful hand closed on her daughter's arm. The black velvet dress imposed itself on blue and silver, encompassed it, overcame its resistance, escorted it across the room and through the door. The English dinner suit closed in behind the women.

Alone in his chair, Timothy heard them walking above him. Doors opened and closed. He sat on. Presently he felt his heart end its long race. Tired, it seemed contented to lie almost quietly within him, breathing as he breathed without effort, resting, dormant, a little numbed with fatigue and now without the strain of happiness or hope. Later, he knew, that hidden and darkly wet spring would remember its other purpose, the mysterious function of pain. With unnecessary haste it would drum at his side, beating out a lamentation of his agony and shame as the stricken races of the East strike their breasts with cries of woe. But now, sitting in the deserted room, he was grateful for this lull of peace. There was nothing to do, nothing to feel, nothing to think. His lids came together and his eyes behind them felt

like two wads of cotton, vaguely shaped, not quite compact. Behind them ran a slender white girl from shadows into sunlight—Erna as she must have looked ten years ago. She was catching a red ball, turning her face with its streaming hemp-colored hair up to the golden sky and laughing as the ball fell away from her grasp and rolled under a lilac bush. Through the leaves he saw the white of her dress, patched now with green.

"Oh, excuse me, Mr. Doan."

He started awake. Agnes, interrupted by the sight of him in the chair, had been startled into speaking, her hand on the switch. She stood with large eyes fixed in the fear she seemed to feel for even familiar things like water bottles or the flowers she sometimes clipped and replaced in their vases. Her frightened eyes expanded until they were enormous in the paleness of her face, under her lifting black hair, and her mouth, drooping and open, never seemed quite to close through constant apprehensions. And how thin she was—thinner than Erna—thinner than any girl he had ever seen—as thin as an adolescent boy stripped for swimming with the sun tracing his ribs as if it were a lesson in anatomy.

"I must have been falling asleep," he said and left the enclosing chair. "I was tired tonight." He looked away from her while he passed, remembering Lyman's presence in the hall, probably just outside the door, before his father had left. Had Lyman gone to the kitchen, gizzard stuffed with his news

like that of a swollen bird? Timothy thought of the stout chest, protruding before him as he walked, watchful and sly through the house. He would have said, "What did I tell you? Mr. Timothy's up to no good. I heard his father call him a fool." No wonder Agnes was gazing at him like that—frightened of having admired a fool—she who had looked up to him and agreed with Mary that he was a fine young man with a heart of gold. No one left now who cared for him. Except Hannah. He swelled suddenly, filled with homesickness for her and the old kitchen. Tears burned his eyes. His heart, prodded again by a blow of pain, awoke and began its pad-pad in his breast.

"Good night, Agnes."

"Good night, Mr. Doan." Her voice, thin and pale like herself, spoke at his side.

The switch clicked behind him, calling down darkness. He began the stairs, the sad thin voice still in his ears. Agnes was unhappy, too. Had he been less dragged down by his own weight he would have stopped to ask her why. Yet what did he want to know about Agnes, the maid? Of course, she was unhappy. All girls in the service of an exterior domesticity were unhappy. What did they have to be happy about, poor slaves of beds and baths, and silver they must meet only over a box of polish and discolored rags? Yet he felt there must be something especial, perhaps private, in the wan misery of Agnes with her transparent face and eyes that

stared. Just as there was something unusually wrong with his transplanted life in which he could satisfy no one, give no one pleasure or service.

He listened at Erna's door and heard nothing but his own blood in his ears. He knocked and waited. Mrs. Swift must be in her own room. She would be talking with unrestrained voice if she were with Erna. She never sat in silence, wondering what to say. He turned the knob and went in. His first quick glance fell upon Erna, dressed and lying on the bed, her face pushed into the pillow, her arms over her head.

"Erna!"

She moved, sliding her cheek over the linen. "Go away. Mother's coming back."

Coming to the bed! he asked. "What for? What's she been saying, Erna? What's she going to do?" A warm terror moved over his skin, a premonition that brought him heat and restored the lightness of his body. "Can I come back after she goes?"

"No." She lifted her arm, moved it at him, let it fall in its small and tender heaviness. "She's going to stay in here. Tonight and tomorrow night, too. Till we go to Palm Beach."

"Why, Erna? Why?"

She twisted her head and looked up at him, her swollen eyes closing in the light. Two new tears made bright lines on her cheeks. "It's too awful—too—too *vulgar*, Timmy. I can't tell you."

"But you must!" He drew her up to him, holding

her wrists and supporting her limp body. "There isn't anything you can't tell me. Nothing in the world. Tell me, Erna. Tell me right away."

Her head rolled back on his shoulder. "Can't, can't, can't!" She sobbed and he felt her fingers in his hair. "It's too—perfectly disgusting of mother."

"Tell me!" He shook her limp arms. "I—I *order* you to!"

She stopped crying and lifted her head. "Don't be so *fierce*, Timmy. I'm afraid when you look at me like that. I told mother you were capable of doing something desperate."

"What did she say? Why is she going to stay in here?"

She closed her eyes and said simply, "She wants to be sure I won't have a baby. That's why she's taking me to Palm Beach. She says you must be alone and decide what you're going to do with your life. If you can make things up with your father —Oh, Timmy, please try. Please, darling. Then you can send me a telegram and I'll come right back to New York."

"I see." He let her drop back to the bed. He stood up, his face white and set into strange crooked lines. "I guess I'm growing up at last. I see things tonight I never saw before. And I know that no one but myself is to blame. It's all my fault because I'm sort of queer—not like the others—Sham or Thad. I should never have married you."

"Timmy! You——"

"Yes. I know you love me. But there's more than that in life—marriage and love. I know it now. I used to think that to be happy was everything and that money shouldn't count. I'm an impractical fool, just as father says. I'm a damned ass—just as Sham thinks I am. Money, money! That's what makes the world go round. Not love! Love doesn't count. Only money—*money!*"

"Please—mother will hear."

"Let her hear! It's what she thinks, isn't it? I don't care, I don't care——"

"Timmy!"

His eyes swooped down on her head, a silver medallion edged with yellow. "Money!" He said the word again, his dark eyes brooding on the coin of her face. "Not you. The others. And they're changing you. You'll grow like them, perhaps—you will, Erna, if you stay with them."

"Timmy!"

"You won't be able to help it. Your mother—" He let his breath out in a rush. With his gaze fixing her to the pillow, he tried to see his future, all dimness and with no strict outlines, as a man crossing the street to his house in a fog tries to distinguish with each step of approach the increasing saliency of the face of his home.

"Please go. I'm nearly crazy with all of you at me. Don't make it worse. I—I'll do what I can."

He went to the door. What a promise from her

to him! No, I can't let you have any money today. Sorry. But if you'll drop around next week—It was the same thing. "Good night, Erna."

In his room he turned the lock in the door and went to the mirror. "You good-for-nothing weakling, proud of that face of yours! You damned failure with long hair! You fool, you lazy coward." He struck the glass a blow with his fist, then another and another in a conjugation of hatred against the pale reflection with his own distracted eyes, cursing his image and directing against a shadow all the sickening futility of his life, the lives about him, life itself—blow after blow, sore bones against smooth cold, unmoved by all his spectacle of pain.

VIII

Timothy entered the outermost office and addressed himself to a smooth blond young man who presided over a telephone and a pencil.

"I'd—could I see Mr. Doan? He's my——"

"Have you an appointment?" The young man raised his eyes, received into them the impression of an ill-at-ease salesman, younger than himself. He spurned Timothy with an eclipse of his lids.

"No—I haven't. But if you'll tell him——"

"You'll have to make an appointment."

"Oh! Can I do that now?"

"Don't think so. His secretary's busy." He picked up the pencil and tapped the telephone with it. "You'd better write what you want in a letter."

"Well, I guess I won't." Timothy took a card from his pocket. "He's my father and he'll want to see me—at least, he might want to."

The young man read the card and jumped out of the chair. "So sorry, Mr. Doan. I didn't know. Will you come in here? I'll tell Miss Sawyer right away. Please excuse me. The rules——"

Timothy sat down to wait in an enormous room that shone at him with its bright spaces and floor like a pond scraped clean. He saw the walls with

their advertisements of Solid Hosiery in frames fit for precious portraits. His eyes felt rusty in their sockets—as if they needed to be oiled for easier movement. He put up his hand and touched his forehead through habit, brought it down again in a start of memory. The lock no longer loosed itself to fall across his eyes. It had dropped to the barber's feet three days ago to mingle with other useless hair from heads, cheeks and upper lips. His unshadowed forehead was now a symbol to him of his clipped new state and the lock had been shed with the last of his youth, the termination of his illusions. All clean now like a sponged slate and he was too old to write on a slate. Paper now and ink to smudge it with in a frantic effort of cramped muscles and signs about him reading, "Null and void if you blot it." "Last chance so beware." "Watch your step." "Follow the straight line." His hands were trembling and felt like lumps of putty. The right one was still sore and stiff from the drubbing he had given the glass. He moved the fingers. They'll have to be remolded. If father will let me. And if he won't? He's got to. I'll make him. By God, I'll talk to him this time. For Erna. Pride into the gutter where it belongs. No time now——

A door opened and a woman with a scar across her chin swung toward him across the room, her lips already drawing into a respectful smile. He got to his feet, swallowing a cold hard lump.

"Will you come in, Mr. Doan?"

She started back for the door she had left slightly open and he followed her closely. It was somehow easier to go in to his father with her—guided and preceded like an escort of honor. Like this, she would be the one to get the first dark look, the first bark. He scuttled across the threshold, his will trying to detain the bulwark of Miss Sawyer's plump black shoulders. They came across his chest and her brown hair, wiry and stiff, made a screen between his father's eyes and his own.

"Good morning, Timothy."

The crisp voice that belonged to all of his life. It started a vibration in him of fear and futility. "Good morning, father." Without looking behind the expanse of low desk, he dropped into the visitor's chair and waited for the door to close out the secretary's small smile.

"Well, Timothy, what's brought you here? Have they made you president of your bank?" His laugh trailed coldly down Timothy's back.

Timothy gripped the sides of his chair, alarmed at the violence of emotions that climbed in him, drawing themselves up through the tower of his body by strong purposeful feelers. "I'm afraid not, Father. In fact—Mr. Daintry let me go yesterday."

Mr. Doan's great head poised itself forward. He nodded. "So you come to me as a last resort."

"It wasn't my fault. My work was all right. He

said it was. Only they don't need so many men just now."

"And may I ask what you intend to do?"

Timothy snatched his hands from the chair and threw them on his father's desk. "Oh, you're going to make it hard for me! But I'll say anything you like. I have to—for Erna. You've got me where you want me at last. Begging you for help. They took Erna away from me to Palm Beach—so there wouldn't be any danger of a baby I couldn't support. Wasn't that rotten? Don't you see how rotten it was—working on me through her? What decent person would have thought of it? Don't you see——"

"I can't say as I blame them." Mr. Doan's large lips drew themselves in, contracting and pursing. "I can't see that you've shown them much to date of your value as a husband and father." He leaned forward and his eyes flashed at his son with a bitter light. "You haven't shown any of us anything. Never. Your whole life has been a constant fight against your family. You've never failed to be on the wrong side of every question. You've always acted like a fool about everything. You've defied ——"

"I know." Timothy's voice slipped back, caught down by the pull of the tentacles that had now reached his throat.

"Huh! Glad you admit it. The first time you ever admitted you were wrong and we were right.

I guess that ought to be worth the loss of your grandfather's money."

Timothy's breath sobbed into his lungs. "Yes—it's all true. I'm the one that's wrong. I've thought so ever since they took Erna away. That's what beat me, I guess. Father—" He threw out his hands.

"Quiet, son. No use getting hysterical."

"I know you despise me for that, too. I always feel things too much. I don't know why. I ought to have been May and she me. You'd have liked me better then."

"Really, Timothy, I must——"

"Will you take me in, Father? I'll learn about business and work hard. Oh, I will! I'll come first and go last—like Sham—and Thad. Will you let me, Father?"

Mr. Doan squeezed his mouth into a purse of flesh and above it his eyes sent out a metallic light that would have clinked on steel. Small corrugations rolled across his forehead, changing shape with his thought.

"So you've come to your senses?"

"Yes, Father."

"When do you want to go to work?"

"Now. If you'll let me."

"Huh!" Mr. Doan's finger came to a point on the bell. His forehead smoothed itself, his lips came open, the light in his eyes seemed trying not to change into a reflection of his pleasure. "Well,

we'll see if a fool can change his spots." To screen his emergence from severity, he pushed the ledges of his eyebrows together to make a shelter and cleared his throat with a loud noise. As the door opened into the room he called, "Come here, Miss Sawyer. I want to tell you that my son here is coming into the business. Just take him to Mr. Davis, will you? He can show him around the place."

"Oh, how nice, Mr. Doan!" Miss Sawyer's voice welcomed Timothy, and her eyes, dark and worn, seemed comparing him with his father.

"It's about time he was learning about things—serious things, you know. Hum, yes." He reached to Timothy's shoulder and clapped it with his enormous palm. "You've got a lot to learn, my boy. All the things of your grandfather's time—all the things I've worked for to make improvements in the business."

His hand still clung to the cloth of his son's shoulder, clinging, patting paternally, no longer victorious. Rather touching him with a warm gratitude that astonished Timothy into glancing up to his father's eyes which he caught smiling on him in the look of affection he had always given to May's small words and cries of "Daddy!"

"How nice," repeated Miss Sawyer.

"Yes, indeed. The right kind of son is an asset in a man's business. Gives a—you know. Now, Timothy, go along with Miss Sawyer and be back

here at one o'clock. We'll go to lunch together."

"Excuse me, Mr. Doan." Miss Sawyer held up a little book. "You have an appointment for lunch with Mr. Cressy, Mr. Bridgeman, Mr. Conn."

"That's all right. Timothy is coming, too. I want them to meet—my son."

Timothy followed her to the door on feet of rubber. He tried to hold them to the floor but they rebounded at each step and he felt himself prancing ridiculously behind the plump back like a pony out of control from want of exercise. Through his flaming mind ran Erna's name, Erna's face. She had said she would come back. Little Erna, restored to him again. He had bought her and he felt the price was fair. Erna would be coming home.

"Father!" he called from the door and looked back at the standing body, pulling to the limit of its great stature and surmounted by a head that seemed to lack the pride of a mane. "May I send a telegram?"

"Anything you like, Timothy. You're at home here now." Mr. Doan passed his hand through the air, encompassing in the gesture a largeness of hospitality and good will.

"I'll get you a blank right away," said Miss Sawyer as she closed the door. "Then we'll find Mr. Davis." Her glance, even her walk, deferred to him. Well, this part of the price for Erna, he couldn't help feeling, was pleasant enough to pay.

IX

Four days later Erna's answer came by mail.

"Darling Timmy, I'm so happy! So is mother—and father's happy because mother is. You know. I tried my best to come back when your telegram came, but you can imagine how that was received. So I'll have to stay on a few days more and then try again. Work hard and please your father. Life is so much more agreeable when there aren't any rows. I could just *die* when I see mother bad-tempered and you scowling around the house. And you were always too tired from the bank to take me dancing. But now everything's all right and soon we'll be living alone with no one to scold or give unnecessary advice.

"I had a letter from May. Thad's been up to see her. Now what do you think of that? He must like her a lot or she must have encouraged him, because you know it's no fun for him to sit around that darned school parlor—of course you never saw it, so you don't know it's the ugliest room in the world and as cold as a barn in winter. So maybe they'll be engaged, and that will be grand. Thad's so clever, they say.

"Be a good boy and go to bed early so you'll be rested when I get back. It would be wonderful if you were here. There's only one man who dances as well as you and Sham. Do you see much of Sham? He said he'd write, so I suppose he will. With a great big kiss and all the love in the world, from your loving little wife, Erna."

Timothy, standing in the hall, read the six pages of sprawled writing and kissed them. He studied the picture of her hotel. Which of those small identical squares was the window of her room, enclosing her, making of a sunny point in Florida the most important dot on the globe? "This is my room. Cross marks my room." But she hadn't——

"Will you have your dinner, Mr. Doan?"

Raising his head, he saw Agnes, lighted by the dining room. "Yes—whenever you like."

"That can be in ten minutes if you're hungry."

"All right. I'll just wash up a bit."

The letter in his hands and already warm from them, he ran upstairs. Lucky he had had a feeling about it coming tonight. He had seen it lying on the tray with other letters and folded papers. His father had been displeased by his refusal to go down to the country, but had admitted that the jolting of the car might increase a headache of however fictitious severity. He would go down for the week-end and, thinking already of the hours with Hannah, he took off his coat and ran to the bathroom. Hannah would be eager for details of his life with Erna.

She would listen with bright simian eyes to his flowing words—thousands of words that described and repeated the marvel of Erna in the procession of episodes that would be accompanied by the domestic movements of Hannah in her kitchen.

He washed, brushed, missed his lock again, frowned at his vanity, ran down to the dining room. Taking his chair, he refrained from ringing, fearing to hurry Agnes. He could see her, should he change his mind and ring after all, jumping at the biting sound, glancing up with her effervescent expression of terror, perhaps overturning something and burning her already scarred hands. Poor gentle Agnes. Yet she wasn't gentle when he stopped to think. She was frightened out of gentleness—one whom no fear could ever tame into calm, always waiting for another blow. He heard her coming through the passage—opening the door.

"Oh, please excuse me. I didn't know you——"

"No hurry, Agnes."

She went away and presently returned with soup. "It's hot, sir."

"I'm glad. It's a cold night." He took up his spoon and began to eat. "Are you lonesome without Mary and Lyman?"

"I miss my aunt."

Timothy heard her voice behind him, its thinness thickened by a husky nervousness. "And your mother—is she better?" There seemed nothing to do but intone questions at her, and the necessity for

picking up her voice with his own at each answer annoyed him. Not with her but with custom, habit, what is and isn't done—conversing with servants, for instance, Mrs. Swift would say. It was annoying to find that Agnes understood this taboo as well as Mrs. Swift and wished to respect it. A stupid artificial barrier which he ignored—except in the presence of his mother-in-law. "Is your brother working, Agnes?"

"Oh, he's got some funny kind of job. He'll only take the kind he likes."

"Well, I understand that."

"But with mother always sick—he ought—" Her voice behind him descended on his head like a veil, fluttered and was withdrawn.

"Has she always been sick?"

"Since I was ten. I used to sit up with her nights, thinking she was dying. It was terrible for me. Then I'd have to get breakfast for them all and go to school. And I'd fall asleep and the teacher would give me all the bad marks." She took his plate and went through the door.

When she came in he said, "Don't stand behind me, Agnes. I want to talk to you. Is that why you always look frightened? Because your mother ——"

"Frightened? I'm not frightened, Mr. Doan."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty—last month."

"Splendid, Agnes. You can vote for Tammany

next year." He ate quickly, knowing that until he finished she must wait for her dinner. His headache was worse. Nerves and the accumulation of fatigue from his months of worry in the bank, fretting over what he had learned and what had never been clear to him—knowing that his joy at returning home to Erna each night would be poisoned by the family dinner that came first like medicine before a lollypop.

Agnes brought his coffee to the table and stood where he had placed her, swaying a little, he thought, toward a chair, waiting for him to finish, her thin white cheek drooping toward her shoulder.

"Why don't you go out, Agnes? Go see a movie."

"Are you going any place, Mr. Doan?"

"To bed. My head aches. I'll read for a while." Erna's letter in his pocket. He lifted his hand and pressed the little packet through cloth. "Go out, do. I won't want anything."

"I'll go to bed, too."

"But it's so lonesome for you—alone in the back of the house. You can't spend this entire week alone like that."

"I don't mind. I'll see mother tomorrow. Good night, Mr. Doan."

He watched her smile at him, a smile that crossed her lips like a shadow, brief and sad. Poor Agnes. She lived in the shade of other people's activities, in a valley where commands rolled down on her like stones. The door swung after her with a whisper

of hinges and for a moment he held her in his eyes, frail and frightened still from hundreds of nights through which she had sat in terror by her mother's bed, perhaps falling asleep and dreaming something had happened, crying herself awake at her mother's pillow. Asthma and heart trouble, Mary had said. "They can't get their breath. Every night you think they're dying."

He went to his room, turning off the lights behind him in the hall and on the stairs. Erna's door was open, and as he passed he breathed with widened nostrils to smell the softness of her perfume in the warm air. Darling, your Timmy loves you. He touched her letter again, drew it out as if it were her hand, patted it with fingers that remembered the feel of her flesh—smooth and tender palms that crumpled in his grasp and welcomed him with small closing movements.

He hadn't meant to sleep so soon. When someone shook him by the shoulder he opened his eyes, thinking, "It's mother. I forgot to put out my light." Over him hung the face of Agnes, her skin drawn away from the blackness of her eyes.

"Agnes! What is it? Fire?"

"No. It's—it's——"

He sat up quickly. "Is your mother—" He saw all of her now, long tumbled hair, black to her waist, a white bathrobe fastened at her throat.

"I think—someone's trying to get in the house." Her teeth were clicking together.

He sprang from bed in banana-colored pajamas. "Let's catch him, Agnes." He turned on the upper hall light. "The kitchen door? Stay behind me. Don't be afraid."

From behind him on the back stairs she pulled his shoulder back against her. "What if he has a gun? Oh, don't go down there!"

"Keep quiet, Agnes. You stay here. I'll go."

But she followed him. He heard her bare feet brush the steps and in the darkness sounded the recurrent chattering of her teeth. His body burned with excitement and pride. He wasn't afraid. How pleasant it was to feel the dependence of another's fear and have the power of soothing it! If Erna were only here to see him capture a burglar, a redoubtable house-breaker, armed to the teeth and probably with an accomplice outside ready to whistle an alarm!

The kitchen was warm and moist still from the steam of dinner. He listened at the foot of the stairs, hearing nothing at first but the clicking of the clock. Then, cutting the silence, the sounds of scraping and the fall of small glass. He advanced on his toes into the room, waiting in long quick breaths. A light flashed over his head, skimmed the walls, spotted the floor. He made a long step toward the stove, crouching down, ready for a spring. The man had come into the small room beyond the kitchen and now was standing in the door. Timothy heard the soles of shoes slipping over the floor in a

cautious investigation. If that light touches me he'll shoot. Over the blood that ran through him in exalted bounds, he felt his skin crawling away from bullets.

Bending lower in the darkness, he curled his fingers into hard hooks and lifted his arms toward the source of the streaming light of the lantern. A bubble of a thought pressed up through his mind, made a little dome on its surface and burst. The last fight I had was in the dark. That night with Sham on the lawn. He saw the picture etched on darkness with the white and silver of Erna's dress. He gave a shout and sprang.

"Drop that gun!"

His hands caught to cloth, thin, cold and greasy. Under it a small body, almost without flesh, grew tense with resistance, then dropped to one knee.

"I ain't got no gun."

The voice protested on one whiny note, speaking all the words together in an invocation of fear. A lonely night voice, sick and weak, that gave in to capture so willingly that it almost seemed to thank Timothy for his trouble.

Holding down the shoulder bones, Timothy felt his exultation drain out of him. The moment now seemed ordinary, even ridiculous. A strong hulk of a young body bearing down on one that seemed to be grateful for his weight like a girl in love. He got up.

"Let's have a little light here."

As he walked to the wall and felt for the button he knew what he was risking. As if any sane person would take a burglar's word that he had no gun! He swung around as he pressed the switch. "Why haven't you any gun?"

The man was bent on his knee as Timothy had left him, head turned up in an old cap. "Me sister stole it off me. That's why. But I wouldn't have had the nerve to use it, I guess."

Timothy planted his feet apart on the floor in their smart leather slippers. As his eyes passed over the man's ragged clothes, he felt effete and ashamed. On the wan and beaten face with its blood-shot eyes, he saw the impression he was making, warm and well-fed, absurdly adorned in yellow silk. "Didn't you ever use a gun?"

"Nope." The little man raised himself slowly. "I ain't never done many jobs. My first alone, this one is." He stood and stretched out his hands in a forlorn gesture. "No luck. Go ahead, call the cop."

Timothy stared at the wreck of the broken face, white, veined with red on the cheek bones, milky white about the eyes in two patches of flesh that seemed skimmed of their surfaces. A face that had been trampled, starved, struck, humiliated with the saliva of society.

As he gazed, Agnes came down the stairs in her bare feet and Timothy turned to her. "Come on in, Agnes. It's all right."

"You caught—" Her voice, meagre and husky with fear, hardly made its way to him.

"Well—" He laughed. "It wasn't much of a fight."

The little man hunched his shoulders and looked at them. His dry mouth, a discolored line in his face, jerked with a smile. "I ain't no fighter. That's right."

"You're not much of anything," said Timothy. "Hungry?"

The man's hands went to his stomach, pressing it, fastening it into the belt of his trousers. He gave the belt a hitch and pulled it out from his stomach. His mouth opened, twisted, and spread. He began to cough, bending over to control his breath. His hands moved in spasms as he finally gave himself over to paroxyms of coughing.

"Sick, too, aren't you?"

The little man wiped his face on his sleeve. "Sure."

"Better sit down."

"Aw, what's the use of taking your time? Ain't you going to call the bulls?"

"Of course not. Agnes, make sandwiches. Is there any beer? But you'd rather have whiskey, wouldn't you?"

He nodded, searching Timothy's face with eyes that were tame and inexact in their focusing. "I would. It'd be— Say, you're all right."

Agnes moved to the other side of the room.

Timothy heard her in a continuous movement of broken sounds. He felt happy and powerful, but as if it were accidental that he held the situation—just because he wore bright silk—something that might have belonged to either of the others—as if it were his turn to play Beau Brummel in a family masquerade in which under epidermal comedy all of them would soon change rôle and, tired by the hour, run upstairs for a pillow fight. It interested him to compare this feeling so natural to him with the protests his family would scream out, should they open the door at this moment, to see him in comradeship with a criminal and a servant, at his ease, understanding them both better than they understood each other, nearer though they were to each other in class. Agnes, he felt, would have been relieved to call the police, not as a measure to protect society, now that all personal danger was past, but in the same convention that moved her to wash her hands when they were dirty, or to make a genuflection when passing before the altar of her faith. It was a matter of reflexes.

He watched the little man rub his fingers, consider the chair he didn't quite dare to take, divide his brief bobbing glances between him and Agnes. Perhaps Agnes was puzzling him as much as his clean escape from the cops. She didn't look like a servant, wrapped in a white bathrobe. Timothy saw her spare hips and the weeds of her black hair

that swayed, clinging to the cloth in thin strands after the mass of it had swung by. And when her profile flattened on the wall beyond in her turnings, he noticed it was made of fine bones, brittle in their quality, he thought, their sharpness showing through the skin. No, there was nothing of peasant heaviness in Agnes. His eyes passed down her scant flanks, dropped to her feet. There he saw the truth of her origin. As from the tough roots of a thin tree, Agnes sprang up from broad strong feet. As they lay flat to the floor, he marked each separate toe, the smaller ones slightly hooked as they grasped at the smoothness of blue and white linoleum, holding to the checkered pattern as in her younger days of country freedom they might have clung to grass blades or the flowers she had decided not to gather, being too small or colorless. The flesh of her feet was less white than that of her face. It seemed to be still stained with the sun of the past summer and under the fresher tan lay the layers of all her other summers. Yes, the story of Agnes was written on her feet as it was on her face.

The little man dared to sit down when Agnes brought a plate. Timothy poured whiskey into a glass and watched him take it at a swallow, bread and meat stuffing out his cheeks, making way for the drink to pass. Timothy's happiness was on the wane as he watched the man's satisfaction, so momentary that he wondered at its importance. Filled

with food and warmth, he would go out again into winter streets and when comfort, so brief, so physical, faded out of his body, what would he think about? Another house to rob, the terrors of his dark life, his approaching death from consumption.

"Just a minute. Don't go yet."

Timothy hurried into the warmth and largeness of the house, passing through memories of all his little scenes as he saw the doors to the library, the dining room, the drawing room. Their influence on his days reached out at him as he went by, like hands stretched to touch him.

He brought back to the kitchen an overcoat and a twenty dollar bill. "Here. Sorry it's not more."

The man held the overcoat between his hands, cracked with cold and dirt lying in the seams of skin. His spotted face, shaded by his cap, seemed not to be thinking of his windfall so much as searching for words that would be appropriate for Timothy, caring for once what speech might be ordered to convey an appreciation for an occasion where words of reflex, the ordinary carriages of his meaning, would be small and incongruous, like a pony cart in a procession of state.

"Don't bother," said Timothy. "Put it on. Would you rather leave by the front of the house? I'll stand in the door in the light in case anyone is going by."

"Yes, sir."

His gratitude was pressed into the simplicity of

this assent. He straightened his back. His eyes met Timothy's in a soft fraternal meeting of glances, the Western counterpart of a Russian kiss of goodwill and sympathy from peasant to peasant, each knowing what the other hides under his great coat of vermin or pain. Timothy wanted to put out his hand. But why wish this man luck he could never meet?

He went to the door. "Good night, Agnes. I'll go up the front way. Lock the inside door there in case we have another visitor."

"Yes. Good night, Mr. Doan."

He smiled at her as he went through the door. Her face was turned up and her eyes looked enormous and black with fire. She seemed detached, gazing through him at something beyond.

"Come this way."

"Yes, sir," said the little man.

Timothy led the way through the house. Perhaps Agnes was still frightened. Perhaps he should go back and speak to her again. No, better not. Alone with him she would be conscious of the nightgown under her robe and her naked feet——

He unfastened the chain and pulled open the door. The hall light made a path down the steps. "There you are. Good night. I can't say, 'Come again.'"

"No, sir."

Timothy watched him examine the length of the street as he went down the steps, glazed with ice. Everything safe. He was holding his overcoat about

him now, facing east, head into the wind. He began a running step toward his haunts, his incredible story, Timothy knew, already moving on his dry blue lips.

X

Mr. Davis had arranged a desk for Timothy by a window in his own office, filled its pigeon holes with note paper in three sizes, hidden its uselessness with a set of files, a calendar, a large blue blotter, a set of advertising booklets.

From where Timothy sat at this orderly desk, in his hands a small book (privately printed) that contained the Story of Doan's Solid Hosiery, he could see by a turn of his eyes the black coat of his father's general manager. The coat had tails that were pompous and too short for the dignity of Mr. Davis' bulky body. To see him crossing a room, his vest as tight as the skin of a drum, was to imagine the accident that might follow a severe sneeze or the achievement of a high step—a bursting of his fretting buttons and he would stand before the Doan employees in all his convolutions of pink and pendant flesh, healthily macabre, and as without dignity as those fat representations of rich men being pitchforked into hell, that are to be seen in all the beauty of early Italian naiveté—rosy and reluctantly advancing sinners whose countenances are so chubby that the painter was at a loss to fasten

into them an expression of terror fitting to their fate.

Timothy looked away from the blushing hairless neck and drew a sheet of paper—largest size—from a compartment. He began to write, "Darling, what is the matter? You wrote you were coming—I've met two trains—and then you didn't come. I must know when you're coming home. I can stand it if I only know definitely. But when I——"

A knock at the door poised his pen at the bottom of the "I," a small neat letter, drawn without egoism.

"Mr. Doan wants to see young Mr. Doan."

Timothy slipped the sheet of paper under the blotter and went out. What have I done now? His hand faltered on his father's polished panels, dreading the contact of the wood. He thought how every hand in the establishment of his father hesitated as it was lifted to tap at that dreaded door, and he saw them in all their varities of size and epidermal distinctions, lifting reluctantly one by one in the custom of gaining permission to the last room in the world anyone would wish to enter. Except Miss Sawyer. Her constrained small smile seemed to triumph as she moved with freedom in and out of the door marked PRIVATE, her dark worn eyes lighting only in this passage to and fro, quick and plump, uniquely fearless, her curious scar catching the light as she raised her chin.

She came out of the door now as Timothy's hand

was about to fall and, seeing him, drew back. "Your father wants——"

"I know." He closed the door for her and turned to the desk, meeting fully the waiting look that sat, poised and unpleasant, over Mr. Doan's idle and powerful hands.

"Sit down. That chair. Hum. Well, Timothy —what do you hear from the south?"

"I—I think Erna may be back any day now."

"Um." He stirred in his chair. One large hand was withdrawn from his desk, slipping over the brilliant mahogany, leaving on it the smear of warm skin. "When do you think of going to work?"

The question struck Timothy's face like a gust of wind and closed his eyes. He opened them, blinking. "Work? What do you mean, Father? I thought I was——"

"You thought your mere presence was enough? Say, you've been lounging about the place like a guest at a house-party. Or an employee. You're supposed to be learning how to run this business."

Timothy gazed at the massive face, fixed into authority by achievement and an ambition that would drop away from it only when it had settled into the indifference of death. "I—I——"

"What have you been doing with your time? Have you thought of any suggestions for improvements—or expansion? Advertising?"

"But, Father! In three weeks—" His throat began to burn. "There hasn't been time——"

"I know all about the time! I didn't expect anything worth while from you. What I wanted was some show of interest in how the business is run. Say. I bet if Thad came in here for a week he would be telling me what to do and have the whole scheme set down on paper!"

"I'm not like Thad, Father. I—I guess I haven't much talent for business. Everything here seems to run like a clock. I didn't know there was anything to do—I mean, more than you had planned out already."

"What's that? So you think we run on inertia here, do you?" He brought back his hand to the desk with a thump and all the small objects before him jumped up from the wood. "So that's how you think this place is run—inertia! Pretty good!"

"Oh, no, Father! I——"

Mr. Doan flung himself across the desk. "I wish to God Almighty someone would tell me what I've ever done to deserve a son like you! You're just an utter ass. You live in the clouds. You might as well be an artist—except you can't paint. You can't even play the piano with ten fingers. What do you live for, anyway? Love?"

"I—I——"

"Answer me! What are you good for?"

Timothy bowed his head before the utilitarian. What was he good for? He couldn't answer that question. He didn't know. He muttered, "I've tried to—understand—how the business is run."

"What of it? Any clerk can do that. As far as I can make out the only thing you have contributed here besides your ornamental presence is the opinion that I make too much money!"

Timothy closed his eyes and felt as if he were shrinking in his chair. As always when he was the pivot of a paternal storm, he saw the old library at home. The bookcases with their sets of the classics closed him in. He smelled the particular odor of his father's cigars that could never be set free from carpet or curtains. He lifted his head and tried to smile, his eyes dulled and heavy-lidded.

"What shall we do about—about me, Father?"

"Wake up, that's all. Go to work. Stop dreaming at your desk and writing love letters. My God, aren't you married to the girl? Go to Thad and get some ideas from him. He'll give you more in five minutes than you could think up for yourself in five years. That boy has got the real stuff in him."

Thad. The ideal young American. Going up like a sky rocket. "Is it true that he and May ——"

Mr. Doan's face relaxed. His mouth seemed pleased. "I don't know about that. I hope so. There's no one I'd rather have for a son-in-law, I can tell you."

Timothy dragged himself up from the chair. "I guess you wish you could exchange him for me. Everybody would be happy then. You and mother and the Swifts. Everybody but Erna."

"Is that so!" Mr. Doan pinched the end of his heavy nose with his thumb and finger, tweaked it and tightened his mouth again. "Well, even Erna might like the right kind of husband. Don't be too sure of her, young man. Her mother's no fool—except about politics."

"What do you mean, Father?" Timothy came back to the desk and stared down at Mr. Doan's sly eyes. "I'm as sure of Erna's love—as—as—that I'm alive."

"All right—all right. Only don't be too blind."

"But—but— Father, tell me what you mean!"

"Well, I heard that Roger Wickersham went down to Florida last week. Rather a long way to go, I thought, just to get out of the cold for two days." He moved in his chair and settled his arms on the desk. "I've got some work to do, Timothy, whether you have or not. I'd advise you to think over our little talk." He lifted his ponderous shoulders, waved his hands apart and dropped them in an insulting gesture of resignation.

Timothy left the room, closing the door with the extreme care of contempt. So this was his father's revenge for his inefficiency. Simply beastly. He went back to his desk with the steps of a somnambulist and picked up the Story of Doan's Solid Hosiery. He sat and stared at the pages. But instead of the boastful print he saw Erna and Sham sitting under a palm tree, their shoulders touching, their hands joined together on her white skirt.

XI

Lingering before the hall table, Timothy touched the glassy surface with his fingers. In this blurred and reluctant mirror he saw his hands, gloved, distorted, trailing in slow disappointment until they dropped off the edge, empty of a letter. His eyes received the high lights of the wood without being impressed by them, like a photographic plate that has already been exposed to the light and is now unable to receive the nuance of shadows. He felt robbed, rifled of hope, as he went without sound through the quiet house. He had been so sure of a letter today! Coming home through the bellow of the subway, charging under the cellars of the city, he had seen it waiting for him on the table, a gentle dim letter that blocked the wood with a square of white. He had even felt it in his fingers, precious and sacred from hers, the warm words still hidden while he held them, unknown and lonely, against his breast.

While Agnes brought in his luncheon he sat looking at Erna's chair. Its dark and empty back pressed against his eyes, tightening his sense of desolation in the large deserted house, filled with shadows that seemed to be waiting with him for the coming of a

voice. Agnes, too, seemed of the shadows as she moved about the room, a thin wraith in the black and white uniform of oblivion, a face of paper under a cloudy crown of black—a figure flattened against the wall—a girl of cardboard and ink. Sad and silent Agnes who lived in the shadows.

"It's Saturday, Agnes. Go out and have a good time."

"Where would I go, Mr. Doan?"

He looked at her in surprise. "Wherever you want to go. It's warmer today—nearly spring."

"Yes. Spring." She sighed, stood quietly near his chair and bent her head.

Timothy felt troubled with a guilt he did not understand as he saw her shoes, heavy and awkward, of the country—as if somehow he were responsible for her having come away from her farm, for her standing here with a sigh as she thought of spring. He remembered her rustic feet on the kitchen floor and how they had made him see the grass and flowers they had trod near some New England village. The thought of fields stirring awake ran through him in a thrill of longing. Miles of sweet fields, a blazing orange sun, birds bursting with song and resisting the joys of flight to search in grass for moving food. Flowers shining everywhere like colored stars in a green sky, air hot and perfumed, his dogs leaping up at his hand——

Agnes was going to the door. He called her quickly.

"Where did you live?"

"Maine." She pushed the door and it swung open for her.

His fork clattered on his plate. "Don't go. Let me talk to you. Do you mind? I'm so lonely—for my wife. I used to talk to her about the country. I wanted to live somewhere outside New York. But she wouldn't. She likes to hear the city at night moving around the house. Agnes—for heaven's sake, get another plate and have your luncheon with me! Please. I'll go crazy if I can't talk to someone."

"But Mr. Doan——"

"Oh, please, Agnes! I tell you I've got to——"

The door swung back into the room. She had gone to the kitchen. He listened, reproaching himself. He shouldn't have asked her. He might have known better. She was timid, embarrassed to pain. He stood and began walking around the table. His unhappiness was active and he could not sit with folded passive limbs. He stopped at Erna's place and laid his hand on the back of her chair. She used to sit here, too far from him, listening while the others talked, her small conventual hands clasped together, her eyes lowered to her white fingers, her head bent, as gay under the lights as a marigold. This was the strip of wood that received the pressure of her narrow shoulders, as thin as those of a Chinese girl in a pale old print—a straight vital body that never seemed to get beyond its pro-

mise to bud, all the charm of her constant childishness flowering only in her face. He caressed the wood with his palms, leaning over it as if her soft hair were touching his breast. His eyes were hot with tears. They wouldn't let her come back. She begged but they said I'd be better alone while I learned about the office. What if Sham did go down for two days? Palm Beach is a public place. It wasn't Erna's fault if he went there. How rotten of father to go hinting like that! What a man to have for a father! Underneath everything he hates me. Even more than he used to because I've knuckled under to him for Erna's sake instead of his.

Agnes opened the door. She came in slowly, a plate in her hand. She had taken off her apron and thrown a blue scarf about the shoulders of her straight black dress.

"Oh, I'm glad! Thank you, Agnes. Sit here." He pushed her chair to the table and watched her as she sat down stiffly before him. "Don't you ever get lonely, too?"

She smiled, prim and troubled, blushing. Her modest white neck was turning pink. "Yes, sometimes. Mother was here last night. I thought maybe you wouldn't mind—I showed her around the house. She never saw a grand house before."

He saw her hands moving over her skirt as if to hide in motion their rough discolored skin and scarred nails. "What kind of house did you live in before—in Maine——"

She touched her flying hair and he saw her fingers were trembling. "Oh, it wasn't much. But we had a nice parlor."

"Did you?"

"Mother always loved her parlor."

He tried to see it, chairs and tables placed rigidly, black walnut perhaps. Antimacassars, family portraits enlarged from tintypes, an enormous Bible with a ribbon— But no. Not a Bible. Agnes was a Roman Catholic like Mary.

"Even when mother was sick she used to take care of the parlor. Every day she'd be dusting it. Father used to laugh at her. When he was dying he said, 'Now, Lily, you've got a good excuse to fix up your parlor.' He was always saying something funny like that."

Timothy, listening to her thin gray voice, felt his heart open. He was less lonely now. What charm and relaxation there was in talking to a humble person, too simple to have a critical attitude for his ways. Like Hannah to whom he had given his tenderness for twenty years, Agnes warmed and comforted him with her soft humility. His spirit grew calm from its confusion, reassured by contact with Agnes who demanded nothing of him in conduct or effort. He had no need to pretend he was another person with Agnes.

"I wish I had a house in the country—woods and fields around it—my wife and you and Hannah—lots of animals——"

Agnes began to laugh and he knew why. She found it amusing to be so innocently included with his animals. He laughed, too. And through their voices, lifted in laughter, came a sound—distant, ominous, abrupt.

Agnes jumped from her chair. "Oh! The door —" Her face, stricken, white with terror, gazed at him. Then she ran into the passage. The swinging door waved twice behind her, fanning his face, and shuddered into quiet.

He watched it, unenlightened, as if it had been a face whose animation had suddenly ended, without explanation, in sealed eyes and lips. Then as his mind slowly cast back to the distant thud he had heard, a small singing voice cried out behind him.

"Timmy!"

Erna ran into the room, looking like a lively little animal in her big fur coat. Under her red hat and trailing veil her face, pink and laughing, shone at him as if colored lights were playing on it. She put up her arms and kissed him. "I thought surely you'd meet us at the station."

Her arms had fallen again before his strength coursed back. He shouted, "Erna!" and caught her up, holding her against him while his arms seized and pressed her in a spasm of gratitude. "Why didn't you tell me when you were coming? Why didn't you——"

"We *did!* Father telegraphed. Didn't you get —Timmy, don't *squeeze* so!"

"How I've missed you! I've——"

"So I should think."

Mrs. Swift's voice was a cold knife that cut the room. Raising his head, Timothy saw her standing by the table, her eyes fixed to the second plate laid by his.

"To whom does this belong, may I ask?" She held up a long blue scarf. "Timothy, who has been here?"

"I—I— Nobody." His heart emptied and hung in his breast, collapsed and quivering. Over the shoulders of Erna's coat his dark dilated eyes stared at the strip of bright blue.

"Nobody? In a blue scarf?" She let it float to the floor and settled her shoulders and hands. "Why has your guest disappeared?"

"It—wasn't—a guest. It was—Agnes. I asked her—as a favor to— I was so lonely. Erna—" Those terrible eyes of Mrs. Swift's. They ran through him like lancets, cutting him open, bleeding him into weak cowardice. They pierced him for a liar and a libertine—an offender against every law.

"You asked Agnes? Agnes, the maid? The *servant?*"

He couldn't answer her. As a man caught in a cyclone abandons flight and throws himself flat to the ground, Timothy bent to Erna, waiting for the scathing words. His arms moved about her. She would help him. He cried, "Erna!"

Erna made a movement of quick strength. Her

hands, suddenly tense and strong, pushed against his breast. "Timmy Doan!" She moved back until she stood at her mother's side.

"But, Erna! It was because I was so lonely for you—I was desperate——"

"I don't believe it." Her face, white and set, looked unnatural—as if he were seeing it out of a drawing or under water. "You were always looking at Agnes—that night, too, when you told her she could go out——"

"Erna!"

Erna laughed, a sound of travesty, intended to wound. "And I felt guilty because Sham came down to dance with me! I thought perhaps I oughtn't to see him. And all the time I've been away you've been carrying on an—*affair*—with the maid!"

"Erna!"

"I might have believed mother when she said ——"

"Wait." Mrs. Swift's military body bent to her daughter. "Sit down. Let me talk. Sit down, Timothy."

"No!" He leaped at Erna and caught her shoulder. "Look at me! All the while you've been gone I haven't talked to any woman! Today was the first time, I swear. Don't you believe me, Erna? Tell me—you must——"

"Let me alone!" She jerked her shoulder from his hand.

Mr. Swift came to the door. "What's all this? What's the matter?"

"Go away, Hunter," said his wife. "Take the bags upstairs. I'll be right up."

"Oh, all right. I only wondered——"

"Go away," said Mrs. Swift.

They heard his footsteps in the hall. Mrs. Swift unbuttoned her coat and threw it off. She sat down on a chair near Timothy and folded her arms.

"Working hard, Timothy?"

"Yes. Yes, I am. That is——"

"Splendid. I thought if you took your father in the right spirit——"

Timothy turned from her and faced Erna. "I can't talk about that now. Erna, I've got to——"

"Timmy, let me *alone!*"

"I won't! Not till you take it back. My God, when I think of how I've waited for you—and your letters—thinking of nothing but your coming home —day and night only thinking of you——"

"And spending your time with a servant!"

"I haven't! I haven't!!

"You have!"

Pale and shaking, he gazed into her face. "You've changed. Erna, you've——"

"I don't want to talk to you!" She ran to the door and stood looking back at him, the eyes of a jealous woman in her child's face. "Mother is right. Men are all the same. Even you!"

He watched her turn. She was gone. He heard her running feet down the hall, on the stairs. He abandoned himself completely to his desire to face her again. Rushing past Mrs. Swift, he began to run, too.

"Erna! Wait! Listen, Erna!"

He went up the stairs in great leaps, his legs gathering desperate strength at each bound. "Erna!" He heard the closing of her door and the turn of the key.

Standing outside, he controlled his hands and voice. He must wait. He mustn't shout and pound down her door. He had no right. Later when she was calm—when her eyes no longer hated him—He felt weak and old, crippled with injustice. As he went up to his room, he began to sob. He crushed his hands to his mouth. Weeping and knocking his mouth and forehead with his fists, he went into his room and opened the window. The air, mild and scented with sunlight, filled his mouth and he gasped it in with his sobs.

XII

At seven o'clock Erna knocked at his door. "Timmy, we're going out to dinner now. You can come if you want to."

He flung open the door. "Oh, darling!"

"No darling, please."

"Erna, do you still believe——"

"No. Mother says you're too simple-minded. But it was a ridiculous thing to do. Change your clothes and hurry because they want to talk to you."

"About what?" he asked faintly.

"Oh, practical things. Where is the house your father was going to get for us and how much will my allowance be— It's horrid, but after all we can't go on like this."

His swollen eyes were fixed on her, too stiff to open to their full amazement. "What—why are you —I can't believe it's really you, Erna, talking to me like this."

Turning away, she said, "It's your own fault—not mine."

He caught her on the way to the stairs and swung her around. "Tell me what you mean. I can't bear ——"

"Please don't make a scene." She drew away from his hand. "I'm so tired of scenes. Nothing but scenes from mother for the last few weeks."

"I won't make a scene, Erna," he said in a low voice. His fingers fumbled at her arm, clinging to the bare flesh. "Don't you love me any more?"

"That's not it!" Her small body was pulsating with her quick breathing. "It's nothing to do with love. But you ought to think of other things now that we're married. Can't you ever act like other people, Timmy? You're always sulking and looking as if you had a pain somewhere. You don't *arrange* anything for me. Everybody wonders why I haven't a home of my own—why we live here with father and mother. It's so humiliating! Mother says you haven't any ambition and that you'll never amount to anything unless I make you do what you should."

His arms dropped away from her. "I might have known it was your mother. Oh, I wish we'd never left our little apartment!"

"As if I could have gone on living there, Timmy Doan! Is that what you would have been willing to do? Oh, I'm ashamed of you, Timmy!"

He muttered, "We were happy there."

"Oh, you haven't any sense at all! Your own father says so. He told Sham——"

"Sham!" Timothy's voice filled the hall. "I might have known he'd be in this somewhere. You've been flirting with him, Erna. I've felt it ever since you went away!"

"Flirting, Timmy? No, I haven't flirted with Sham."

"But you let him go to Palm Beach. You've let him——"

"*Let* him? I'd like to see anyone keep Sham from doing as he likes. He's not like you."

Timothy closed his eyes and tried to hide his tortured face. "Erna! To think you'd ever talk to me like this."

"I have to, Timmy; no matter how it hurts you. Mother says it's the only way." She fixed her look to him in calm assurance and for the first time, lifting his head, he saw her mother in her face, changed and chilled, with the premature calculations of a child who had been listening to worldly counsels. The hands he had thought of as belonging to a convent were posed on her hips. He looked at them dizzily, the white idle fingers curved on her gay dinner dress, feeling them about his heart, squeezing from it its blood. He felt them twining in his fingers the twilight he had waited with her on the long bench in the hall for his father to come home. He felt them clasping his arm the night he had walked out in shame from the country hotel. He saw them in the kitchen of the flat, making toast, cutting his orange—such loving willing little instruments, serving him, smoothing his hair, raised in admonition as she called, "Be sure to hurry home tonight!"

"Get dressed, Timmy."

"No, I don't want to go out."

"All right. I'll dance with Sham."

"Dance with him, then!" he shouted.

Her eyes dilated with activity as if she were sure she was reading his thoughts. "I suppose you're planning to talk to the maid again. Well, you won't. Mother has put a stop to that."

"What—what has your mother—" In the travail of his heart he had forgotten Agnes, abandoned her. Poor unarmed Agnes. "Erna, tell me——"

She was going down the hall, quickly and without answering him. He watched her run down the steps, the back of her smooth yellow head bobbing at him—then out of sight. A new pain of pity and conscience was beating in his heart, already bursting. His hands were wet. He felt moisture spreading over his forehead, creeping down his skin. What had they done to Agnes? How had she been punished for listening to him?

Cautiously, fearfully, he went to the back stairs where, half way down, a passage led to the servants' rooms. The doors were closed and he didn't know at which to knock. At each one he whispered, "Agnes" and tapped with his finger tips, standing in the heavy air that seems always to be covering the abodes of the poor. There was no sound. He decided to open the doors, one after the other. Lyman's room—a pair of heavy shoes and a soiled collar on the table. Mary's room—her flannel dress hanging on the wall which she would put on again

tomorrow when her holiday was over. Next a smaller room, in disorder. Papers on the floor. An empty box. All the signs of an hysterical departure —the kind of desperate flight that can be recognized by the first person to enter afterward—an escape that has been made in terror or from shame.

XIII

While Mr. and Mrs. Swift talked in lowered voices, Timothy watched Erna dance with Sham. They moved about the room slowly and in uneven turns, dancing half-time, often seeming to stand swaying on one spot as they talked and laughed. After a while Timothy looked away, pretending to deep reflection, his eyes on the floor. How long it seemed since Erna had laughed with him! Even before she had gone away their evenings together hadn't been gay. He had made melancholy love to her, he remembered, kissing her each time as if it were to be the last. Well, Sham had nothing on his mind—nothing to worry about, no one to support. He shone with the knowledge that he was a success. His uncle's praise covered him like a coat of varnish. From within such shining folds he could make rich gestures of self-confidence and—for Timothy—patronage.

The music broke off in a blast of relief. Mrs. Swift moved upright from her confidences. Erna, flushed and smiling, led Sham to the table and watched him as he pulled out her chair in his important escorting manner.

"What will you have for a sweet, darling?" Mrs. Swift poised her look on her pretty daughter, smiling exclusively. "Pêche Melba? So cooling."

"Yes, Mother." Erna finished the smile for Sham on her mother's face. When it had quite died away, she sought Timothy and let her eyes enter into his.

Having waited for hours for this gaze, he received it with love and pain. He felt his heart melt away at this gauzy touch—a contact of light without the comfort of matter. He saw her flush sinking back into the skin, color and laughter departing together now that she was again in his presence. She looked uncertain, troubled, seeming to remember all their sad scenes and futile contests, his sighs and fears, her kisses in return for his promises. Their gaze deepened, grew darker, yet clung. Her flowering mouth drooped, heavy, perhaps, with words she must hold back. And about it, like shadows trembling in corners, he thought he saw memories of other kisses it had given, speaking for him in a gentle intercession, poignant and humble.

"Erna." He had meant her name to be a whisper but his voice broke over her like a cry and three other heads turned toward him. He began to cough. He lifted a glass and drank some water.

The music started, a liquid rhythmic call to motion. Sham moved back his chair. Timothy moved, too, got to his feet and took Erna's hand.

"Not twice in succession, Sham. Give me a chance."

He enclosed Erna with tender restraint, holding her after her long absence with the precision of his pain, in the care with which one would embrace a precious and delicate vase, preserved from antiquity by a miracle of time. He felt her body soften, yield to him. They moved in throbbing unity. He closed his eyes, whispering, tightening his embrace.

"I love you."

Her face turned slowly up to his. "But you said you wouldn't come tonight."

"I had to. I'm mad about you. Just as if we weren't married."

She pressed her head against his cheek in a sudden movement. "Why aren't you always like this? I love you when you make love to me."

"Do you, darling? As much as—as you used to?"

Erna didn't answer. With her smooth little head bent under his eyes, she danced silently in his arms.

"You don't then."

"It's—so different now. Everything's changed. I don't know——"

"I haven't changed, Erna. It's just—things. I can't help— Oh, tell me what to do!"

She said in a voice of soft despair, "You'll never be different."

"What will happen? You know father—so mean and hard. He's nothing but a slave-driver! Any other father would help his son even if he wasn't much good. Not father!"

"I know why he won't."

"Why, Erna?"

"He doesn't like me—any of us—much."

"How do you know?"

"Mother said so."

"But why didn't he tell me if he——"

"Your mother doesn't like us either."

The music stopped. While Timothy applauded mechanically for an encore, his dazed eyes sought Mrs. Swift. Leaning forward on her table, she was watching him with a feral look, canny and waiting. He shivered. About him hands, lifted and eager, clapped and clapped. The orchestra took up its work again, its indifference disguised by the frenzy of its labors.

He embraced her again, the touch of her body in his arms confusing his analytical speculations. Their future—his father—family enmities—Sham on the border of their lives—Erna's new attitude for him, her husband, her lover— Something dragged at his heart.

"Erna! You won't leave me alone tonight? You'll ——"

"What, Timmy?"

He pressed her to him until their bodies were breathless against each other. "I love you. You must—you must——"

"Yes, Timmy. I will."

They drifted back to their table and Timothy smiled into Sham's sulky face.

"Good music here," he said.

"Yep," Sham replied. He was watching Erna's soft pale hands.

She lifted her spoon and smiled over it vaguely at Timothy, her eyes clouded and warm.

Mrs. Swift touched her husband's arm. "Get the check, Hunter. I'm tired."

"Oh, Mother, can't we stay a little while longer?" Erna dropped her spoon to plead, touching her mother's hand with her fingers. "I want to dance again with Timmy."

"No," said Mrs. Swift shortly. "It's time you were in bed."

XIV

Timothy was to be best man at May's wedding. She wished it and Thad who would have preferred Sham's more solid backing had consented, doting eyes gluttonous with joy and shining upon everyone from his large red face.

Although he had begged her for a private hour, it wasn't until the evening before the wedding that Timothy was able to corner May and lead her up to his old room.

"But I *can't,* Tim. Rehearsal's in half an hour. And I have to pack those dresses that just came. And mother wants——"

"Never mind. I've got to talk to you."

"Well, for heaven's sake! be quick. I don't see why you have to be so mysterious about it."

He closed the door and as he turned to her he thought of the night Erna had waited for him to come upstairs. The night he had first kissed her—here in this room. It was here, too, he had stood before dinner, tortured by doubts, his father's threats, his burning and reverent desire. May had come to the door, Erna's white dress in her arms.

She had asked him for five dollars and after she had gone away he had knelt before the sweet sacred dress and wrapped it about his head.

"Hurry up, Tim. Don't get tongue-tied."

He went to her and took her hand. Under her bang that smelled of a hot iron her pale eyes urged him to hasty practical speech.

"May."

"Yes?"

"I hope I'm wrong. But I don't think you really love Thad."

"Don't love Thad? What are you talking about, Tim?"

"Do you?"

"Yes. Of course. Thad's one of the best——"

"I know he is. But thinking highly of him isn't the same thing as loving him. May— I know you don't. That's what I wanted to talk to you about. Oh, don't ruin your life, May! Don't marry anyone you don't love. It isn't too late. I'll help you."

May pushed him against the table, her face pink with sudden anger. "You're crazy, Tim. I *want* to marry Thad. I couldn't do better. He's earning more money than all the rest of the boys. Why, he'll be general manager of father's office in a year."

Timothy nodded. "I know. But that's not enough. You've seen what a mess I've made of things. Love and no money. Money without love will be just as bad."

May smiled in relaxation, a superior hard widening of her large mouth. "I don't think so. It's better this way—having money."

He walked away to the window. "All right. It's your funeral. That's all I have to say."

"Tim. Is it—so bad?" She came to the window.

Without turning, he stared at the flat flowered blind.

"Tell me. I won't say anything to Erna."

He burst out in a forced low voice, "I love her but I don't think she cares for me any more—much. Ever since she came back from Florida two months ago she's been—well, different—about everything. Her mother persecutes me about father. She's a perfect devil—" He raised his voice. "She's——"

"Sssh, Tim."

"I don't know how long it will last—this way. It's only my love for her that keeps me in that house. It's torture—the way they all watch me. Even the servants—they know I'm a failure—no good at anything."

She lifted her hand and put it on his shoulder. "Poor Tim."

"You know what I think, May? If they could find an excuse they'd make Erna divorce me."

"Timmy!"

"That's what I think. Then she'd probably marry Sham. He's always there—dining with us, looking at me with an important air. Waiting. Waiting for me to be thrown out so he can step in."

"I don't believe it, Tim. You're always so morbid. You know you are. You exaggerate everything."

He turned to her all at once with an imploring passionate face. "I don't want you ever to be as unhappy as I am!"

Her serious eyes studied him with affectionate pity until he had dropped his arm from its gesture. Then they faded and seemed to leave him to seek out her own affairs. "Don't worry about me," she said. "I couldn't be as unhappy as you are. It's not my nature. I can always make the best of everything."

"You're lucky." He watched her as she glanced at the door, eager to be gone. "I never loved anyone but Erna. I wanted all my life to love someone —completely. It seemed to be the only worth while thing that anyone could do—love another person better than——"

"Yes." She turned. "I've got to go down now, Tim. So have you. For the rehearsal."

"Damn the rehearsal!" He flung his arms over his head. "It's a farce! You don't love him. May ——"

"Tim, if you start anything before I'm married I'll be simply furious! Why do you want to spoil everything?"

He saw he had made her angry. Temper was written on her face—lines around her mouth like exclamation points and commas of rage in her eyes.

He had gained nothing except to strengthen her will, as all her life opposition had solidified her. "Come on, then." With a sense of futility he brushed her cheek. "I hope you'll be happy. I hope——"

She took his hand and pulled him to the door, laughing hysterically as he dragged behind her. They ran down the stairs into lights and voices.

"Where do I stand?"

"They *always* forget the ring."

"Let's have another highball first."

"Sssssh! Don't let Mrs. Doan——"

He searched the line of faces. Where was Erna? As he crossed the room he saw her by the piano, her clear profile laid on blue hyacinths. He turned to go to her. As he moved, the hyacinths that had hidden Sham disclosed his face, ardent through a satisfied masculine smile. Then Erna's profile broke into new lines. He had amused her. She was laughing. Bending forward, she smelled the dark flowers with pleasure in her closing eyes. Sham sprang to his advantage. He laid his face next to hers and together they drew a deep breath of perfumed intimacy.

Timothy swung toward the door. "Who wanted a highball?" he shouted. He caught an unknown black coat sleeve and drew it from the room.

. . . . .

There was dancing after the rehearsal. Standing giddily in a corner, Timothy's eyes followed un-

countable couples about the room. His head whirled, cleared to see Erna and Sham go by, began to spin again. He put out his cigarette and dried his forehead. Why had he taken those highballs? The room seemed singing about him, filled with smoky sound. Someone clapped him on the shoulder as he went back to his retreat in the corner. He laughed and leaned abruptly against the wall. There was Erna again, still dancing wtih Sham. And May with Thad, looking up into his red face, smiling softly as Erna used to smile at him. The day they were married. Stuffy little office. The man with the moustache and no handkerchief. A day that blazed with glory. Erna clinging to his arm. His eyes dazed with happiness, her fingers squeezing his in rapture. Afraid they would be caught and separated. Well, she wasn't afraid now. Look at her over there dancing with Sham. Sham made money. He had the right stuff. Big ideas. If he lost money on Wall Street nobody said anything. He could get it back. And Thad. His father had said he had better have a little talk with Thad. Thad was going to be general manager. Well, would you look at the way Sham was acting with Erna! How did that look with her own husband standing here to see it. He couldn't have that. Shameless. He'd speak to her. So many people. They bumped into you. Hard to catch Erna's eye. Looking up at Sham.

"Erna!"

She stopped, stopped Sham, turned back. "What is it, Timmy?"

"Say—dance with me now."

"Why Timmy Doan! You've been drinking."

"Never mind. Dance with me."

"Well, I won't. You'd better go upstairs."

"Don't want to. Come on and dance."

"No."

"Sham, you give Erna to me. I'm going to dance."

"Come on, Sham. I won't dance with him." She moved away and drew Sham with her.

Timothy stumbled through the moving figures. Erna had no right to treat him like that. What if he had taken a highball? Well, four highballs, then. Because he had been jealous. Anyway, it was an occasion to celebrate. Wasn't his only sister getting married? He guessed he'd go see Hannah. She wouldn't care if he'd been drinking. Dear Hannah. His friend, Hannah.

Hannah, preparing the supper, hardly looked up. She smiled quickly, her eyebrows saluting him, then turned back to her dishes.

"Guess you don't miss me much, Hannah."

"Sure I do."

"Go on, you don't. You're glad I'm not here to bother you."

"A lot you know about it."

"Hannah, got to talk to you."

"Tomorrow. I'm too busy now."

"Hannah, got to talk to you *now*. Want to tell you about something that happened in New York. A girl worked for us there and got sent away——"

Hannah smiled, the vague simple smile of inattention. She hurried to the stove. "Tomorrow."

"But, Hannah, I'm—I'm unhappy *tonight*."

"Go on out on the lawn, why don't you? for a while. It's hot around the stove."

He passed through the door. The old lawn. Half a moon. Down by his pool. Warm and quiet here. Good for the head to get out of doors. He sat down on the grass and pulled it up by its chilly roots, smelling the bits of earth that clung. Ah! This was what he wanted. The pungent odor of soil, moist and seeming new for all its age. He lay flat upon the stone edge of the pool and looked up at the stars, bright flecks of cold fire on sapphire velvet. Better to be alone here than in the house—even dancing with Erna. If he were in there now he would be noticing how she was acting toward him, how changed she was from the times she used to laugh like a little bird and put her head on one side. Once she had said, "Oh, I think you're wonderful!" And hearing her small rapturous voice vibrating through his body, he had thought perhaps he was out of the ordinary with his ardent face, hot dark eyes and the black lock that fell down his forehead.

He began to laugh, the muscles of his stomach jerking defiantly below his chest that wished to fill

with a sob. His eyes fixed themselves on the dotted sky that had smelled nearer through his magnifying tears. What a fool he had been in those days. Not so long ago. Not even a year. And now winter had passed and here it was May and everybody making their summer plans and his whole life had collapsed—changed and still changing. What would happen to him next? His father and mother going to Europe next week—that might mean an advancement in the office—he had been trying hard lately to understand everything. Then Erna might become soft again. Poor kid, it wasn't any too easy for her either, with that mother of hers at her all day. No wonder she had grown nervous and jumpy. If she were only left alone—alone with him—alone with Sham—dancing around—damn Sham—he had once fought with him here on the lawn—for Erna—because he had kissed Erna——

He fell asleep.

. . . . .

Only the family was in the living room when Timothy went back. Even Thad, ignoring clocks this week, had departed for town in his car. Mr. Doan was holding May on his knees, doting on her thin cheek as he pinched it, petting her marcelled hair. And she, elaborately dressed and with new important manners, pulled his ears and patronized him, looking over at Erna with friendly contented eyes.

Erna and Mrs. Doan sat divided by an unimpeachable distance. It could not have been criticized for either familiarity or unfriendliness. It was just the distance for members of the same family—by marriage. Nearer would have meant of the same blood. Further, and neither would have been there at all. They both looked up from their conscious attitude when Timothy walked in. Mrs. Doan smiled faintly and her lips drew together to form an inquiry. Timothy knew the question would be, "Where have you been all this while?" and went to her chair.

"I've been out on the lawn."

"Well, I hope you haven't caught cold," said Mrs. Doan.

"Headache better, Timmy?" asked Erna.

"Yes, dear." His eyes passed back to his mother. "Well, you're having lots of excitement, aren't you?" He sat down on the arm of her chair. "A wedding—and then Paris."

She smiled back with vague eyes. "I know."

His arm about her shoulders, he looked again at Erna, seeing that her face had saddened at the word Paris. He tried to send her his tenderness and regret. She had so hoped that his father would invite her to travel with them! He heard her sigh faintly in her chair. Poor Erna. Married to a misfit who didn't even have enough money to send her abroad. No wonder she had changed. And his mother—had she changed, too? No, she had always been

like this with him, vague and strange, with hours of remote disapproval, caught from her husband as she caught his colds. Timothy's eyes above hers searched now hungrily for some sign that he was really of her flesh. He bent quickly and kissed her lips, feeling by a quiver that ran through hers that she had responded.

But it was with an air of regret and wounded affection that Mrs. Doan admitted her maternity, patting his hand, gazing at him in silence, offering to kiss him a second time by lifting her chin. Behind her thin lips were accusations for a son who had turned out badly through his own obstinacy. Still, she seemed to be thinking, she was his mother and he had just reminded her she was going to Europe. A wide ocean—accidents and the acts of God—yes, she had better kiss him again.

Erna moved in her chair, looking at May, curled like a cat on her father's knees. "You *are* lucky! How many people would just love to be going to Paris!"

Her voice was small and febrile in Timothy's anxious ears. She mustn't hint like that. She had promised——

Mr. Doan threw her an impatient look. "I'd rather stay home and be comfortable."

His voice, growling already against the discomforts of travel, seemed as rough as a gesture of dismissal, and Timothy saw Erna wince. Why couldn't his father be more civil? He shouldn't

speak that way to Erna. Sensitive little Erna wasn't accustomed to sharp replies. He saw her sitting timidly on the outskirts of his father's favor, trying to be a part of this important family, on her face the slightest smile that he remembered seeing on the lips of Mrs. Swift's cousins from Mount Vernon. He recalled how Mrs. Swift had greeted them with the chill of patronage and duty, seeming to bend only one ear toward their inquiries like stilted speeches from some old play, rehearsed in the humility of the Mount Vernon home and repeated over and over in the train that had brought them. It hurt him to see Erna like this, eager for a word from his father, moving expectantly when he spoke as if she hoped this time to catch a pleasant word or a smile. He liked her to be proud, independent of his family.

"Let's go up, Erna." He left his mother's chair and took her hand. "You'll be tired tomorrow—and so much to do."

Her hand felt hot and resentful as his fingers enclosed it. It lay in his palm in toleration as if she were feeling a domestic encroachment—a habit of contact that no longer meant anything. Oh, yes, she had changed. Life in her mother's house with him had poisoned her with its air of money-getting, the pull for position, her family's resentment of him, the examples of Sham and Thad. Why had he listened to any of them? Why hadn't he taken her away when she loved him most? They could have

been happy in some simple small place he could have afforded. Then she wouldn't have been sitting here like this, humble before his father, hoping still to be invited to Europe. They would have been resting on a little porch, perhaps, looking up at the moon, her head on his shoulder, smelling the garden he would have planted, talking, planning— My God, she might even have wanted to have a baby!

"Come, Erna."

"All right."

She left her chair and drew away her hand. He put his arm about her shoulders, warm and white, and they went up the broad old staircase. He saw her eyes, circled with fatigue and discontent, the drooping of her small pink mouth.

"Erna—I was thinking tonight—when father goes away it might be better for me—I mean, I might be promoted. I've been working hard——"

She drew away from him and looked up with hard eyes that were narrowed with bitterness. "Oh, what's the use of saying that? You'll never be promoted." She went on up the stairs, leaving him standing on the step where he had spoken, having stopped her there. In her scarlet dress with its long tight bodice, she seemed all hard straight lines and narrow color. She turned into May's room, passing in to switch on the lights. Closing the door, she turned back to him. "I'm going to sleep in here with May. We have so much talk about. Good night, Timmy."

The door swung toward him and shut tight. No crack for even a small and hasty kiss. Its prim white panels seemed to him a wall of rock that had suddenly lifted itself out of the earth to separate them.

XV

"Well, I saw them off."

Timothy hung his coat on its peg and turned to Mr. Davis, who only nodded at the papers before him. He sat at his desk, his heavy hips squeezed into a chair. His head, pink and luminous, was set stiffly upon a small collar as if it had been told not to turn. Timothy felt a sense of disappointment. Now that his father had gone away he had somehow thought the general manager would see in the son the representative of the Doan interests. He had pictured the entrance he would make into the office, coming up from the docks with Erna, the only Doan on the ground with surely some fresh authority to wear, like a new overcoat over a shabby suit. His father had said that Mr. Davis had instructions to deliver and Timothy had thanked the large irritable face, turning to Erna to see if she had heard. And now Mr. Davis was sitting, immersed and silent, as on all other days. Perhaps he had forgotten.

"Mr. Davis, father said you had——"

"Oh, yes, yes."

Timothy watched the head jerk loose from its collar. A pink fat hand darted up and made a peck-

ing motion at a pigeon hole. It brought forth a letter and held it out, waving with impatience to be relieved. He took it slowly. Written instructions. Why? His father's writing, blurred from a blotter. His pen had stuck into the paper on the upward stroke of the Y and dots were clustered there. As if his father had spat at him in ink, he thought, walking to his desk at the window. His heart began to strike at his side, gathering speed and strength. He feared this unknown letter of which his father hadn't spoken. Why had a mystery been made about it? Why was Mr. Davis' manner so strained? And why was he now putting on his hat and coat, leaving the room without a word?

He fingered the flap, tore it. Now he could see the letter inside, four edges of white in the hole he had made, like a sharp bud. He gazed at it, his finger stiff and ready to tear. Holding it inserted, he looked out on the street, a street of trading, fantastically high, threatening him through the pane. The letter in his hand smarted the skin like an irritant. He ripped it apart.

"My dear Timothy: You make it so difficult to talk to you reasonably that I have decided to write what I have to say. When you came into my office and asked me to give you a chance I welcomed you as my son. I gave you every opportunity and put employees at your disposal in order that things would be made easy for you. I have paid you a

hundred dollars a week so you could pay your way at the Swift's until your mother and I could take a house for you. The matter of the house I held in abeyance until I could see how you were going to apply yourself. That I soon found out. You thought application was learning what the other employees were doing and then doing it yourself but not so well.

"In a word, Timothy, you have convince me you can never be trusted to run my business. I am not one of those weak-kneed fathers who carry useless sons along and then turn over the business to them to ruin after they are dead. You think me hard and cruel, an unnatural father. You will never know how many hours I have sat in my office thinking about you and what was to be done. Don't you suppose I would rather leave my business to my son than to a son-in-law? But my son is not cut out for it. He's just an ordinary clerk. But you are my son as well and I'm not going to throw you out for that reason. The hundred dollars a week stops with this letter. I can't afford to pay you that for doing nothing. In the future your salary will be commensurate with the work you do, let us say fifty dollars a week which is more than most of my employees receive for doing valuable work. Let me point out to you that many men support wives and families on that sum—but they don't live in a stylish section of New York. If your wife is worth her salt she'll go with you and live on what you earn.

If she doesn't love you enough for that you'd better get rid of her.

"Report to Mr. Davis on Monday and he will tell you what you are to do.

"Your affectionate father, Edward Doan."

The letter, dropping from Timothy's hands, struck the waste basket, balanced itself on the edge and slid to the floor, folding back into its creases, moving more and more slowly, dying, dying, dead. Like his mind. White and dead, but relieved in its relaxing. It was some sort of end for him. The finish of struggle. Painfully and with dulled pulses striking his temples as if to arouse his dead mind, he bent from his chair and picked up the letter. Mr. Davis mustn't see it. It must be hidden—like a bloody wound or a bare club foot. He must hide, too. From Mr. Davis' contempt. From the pitying glances of the other employees.

He put the letter into his pocket and took his coat down from the peg. He wrote on an envelope, "I won't be back today," and laid it on the manager's desk. When the corridor was empty, he opened the door and went out.

He turned uptown, hurrying through the crowds, plunging through traffic. Drivers shouted at him and pulled their brakes. Men and women, knocked aside by his set young shoulders, turned to look after him. Walking faster and faster, he finally came to a stop, panting and suddenly attentive. He was

facing a window, brightly naked in the afternoon sun and gleaming with a moneyed polish. His eyes, coming to a focus, saw the window's sophisticated contents. Evening wraps of metal and fur. Fans that stared with the intensity of their colors. Dresses of iridescent beads. Nearest his eyes, a white and silver gown. "Erna," he said aloud. He turned and rushed on. At last he knew where he was going. He must see Erna and tell her they were going away. Where? Probably to the country. He and Erna would live in the country. Their own gardens for vegetables and flowers. A little house which he would paint on Sundays. He would do all the work that would be too hard for her. They would have at last a chance to be happy.

He leaped on a bus and felt in his pocket for a dime. No more taxicabs and small extravagances. He must save—watch and guard. In spite of his dread of the coming scene he felt something harden hopefully in his breast. He was going to stand on his own legs and manage their lives. Curious how efficient he felt in poverty and capable of directing small things. Looking out of the window of the bus, he watched the dizzy current of Fifth Avenue with the eyes of a visitor. It wasn't his any longer. It had nothing to do with him.

He felt free and terrified as he jumped to the curb and hurried east. How shall I tell them? What words? He began to plan them, his mind light and clear, oscillating in his head like a trembling light.

Courage began to flow from it into his body like a brighter light, reddish, uncentered. As he ran up the steps he felt mature and strong. He braced his shoulders in the hall, then relaxed. Why do I do that? I'm not afraid.

He appeared in the dining room door. Three faces turned toward him, identically surprised. He looked at them all, feeling the excitement of power. They were in his hands now, seeming to have guessed his importance. Their eyes waited, impatient, hopeful, sly. All at once he remembered he hadn't taken off his hat. He pulled it into his hand. Their eyes followed the movement, bright with curiosity between rows of curved hairs.

"Pack your things, Erna. We're going away."

She went on staring at him. Her face that had been long from amazement, began to broaden with a slow smile of delight. "Oh, where? To Europe?"

"Not to Europe. To some place where we can live on fifty dollars a week."

There was a silence. Suddenly Mrs. Swift threw up her head. Her chin seemed to be a sharp point below her cream-colored face. It looked as if it wanted to pierce him. Her eyes lost their weary encircling lines as blood pushed from beneath into the creases. They rolled at him with the fervor of an evangelist.

"Are you crazy, Timothy?"

"Not now. I have been, I guess, to let you run

my life. It's over now and I'm going to take Erna away." He threw out his arm toward her in command that seemed natural to his new strength. The bright light in his head expanded and streamed through his body, flowing with the heat of blood.

"Well, I guess you're not." Mrs. Swift stood up to face him and reverted to the vulgar directness of her early years. "Erna, living with you on fifty dollars a week! My daughter, who could have the best in New York. I'd like to see you treat her like that."

Mr. Swift slapped the table. "What's happened? Why don't you explain instead of standing there giving orders to Erna?"

Timothy shook his hat at him. "It's about time I gave an order. I've been going around the house like a kicked dog long enough. Everybody waiting for me to get a lot of money out of father and trying to bully me. Well, there's not any money and there won't be. I'm just a clerk now and you'll have to make the best of it."

"A clerk?" Mrs. Swift's metal body fused slowly. She sat down in her chair and under the cream of her thick powder her face faded to a wan gray. She repeated, "A clerk!" Her lower lip loosened and began to tremble.

"Fifty dollars a week." Timothy's voice sounded in the room like a proclamation. "Lots of men support families on that." He divided a glance be-

tween Mrs. Swift's haggard eyes and the baffled face of her husband, effete in the presence of his military wife. He went to Erna's chair. "Go pack."

"No," she said uncertainly.

"Erna!"

She drew up her arms and crossed them over her small breasts, hard as winter apples. Her pointed chin, a weapon like her mother's, aimed at his breast. "No. I couldn't stand living like that."

"What does it matter how one lives, Erna? At least we'll be alone. What does anything matter if you love me and I love you?"

Her childish face that had gained precocity in the last three months, was set against him with implacable clarity. "You've always talked about loving me, Timmy. But you've never done anything to prove it."

The brightness in him began to flash like summer lightning, growing paler and more distant with the passing of its forces. "I haven't done anything to prove—" His breath left him. He couldn't draw it back. He gasped, smothering, with open sagging mouth and his chest struggled with the need to expand. Through the blood in his ears he heard Mrs. Swift's voice, a thin exultant piping.

"You see?"

He sucked in his breath again with a long sharp sound. The room seemed to have grown dark. In the dimness he saw Erna's face, a hard dim egg, fixed, eternal, speechless, the eyes drawn with colored

chalk, designed but without sight. To this oval blotch, pallid and without feeling, he bent his head and shaking shoulders.

"But, Erna—oh, my God—haven't I proved—I've done everything you asked—humiliations—lived in a hell—you don't know——"

Mrs. Swift's voice cut through his. "Are you calling my house a hell?"

"Yes!" He swung around at her, striking against the table.

"Then you'd better leave it."

"That would be best, I think." Mr. Swift's judicial tone dripped into the air, flowing slowly like a syrup. "At least for a time. Then if future developments warrant——"

Timothy turned back to Erna. His sight cleared. He breathed now without sound. Again the room was filled with yellow light—normal shafts of sun that pushed in through the windows. Three calm people, a family unit, were finishing their luncheon. Covers for three. His was not laid. His would never be laid here again. He was going away.

He held out a jointless hand. "Good-bye, Erna."

Her white face looked suddenly smaller. It moved, broke, began to tremble. She hid it in her hands. "Oh, Timmy, this is terrible! Oh, Timmy!"

"Will you come with me?"

Her sobs mounted. "Oh, I can't! Timmy, I couldn't!"

As he strode to the door, feeling motion but no

contact under his feet, he heard her voice still rising in the room, lifted up in weakness and a protest against events, as if she wanted him to carry away, packed into his bags like a present at parting, her assurance of grief, helplessness, and a love that still stirred faintly in her breast.

XVI

The sun was passing up the sky, idle, drunken, good-natured. Its elderly heat, still vigorous, passed into Timothy's shoulders as he knelt in the grass. He scooped out a hole with his trowel and set a rose bush in it. The bronze leaves shivered in the sun as he mechanically patted earth back about the roots. He raised his head. The air from the formal garden was floating by. He drew a breath saturated with the scent of hyacinths and narcissus, his eyes following the rows of tulips, crocus, and daffodils. The iris bent toward him in the slight morning breeze, their blossoms blue or the colors of smoke and wine. Beyond the path, rising above it, bordering its lines, were dogwood trees in bloom, slanting in the sky, their white flowers formal designs in quatrefoil. Lilacs waved swollen plumes of white and blue. A Judas tree, placed nearer, was bursting with small cerise excretions like pimples. It sighed and gave off a sad, faint, evil odor.

He lowered grave eyes to his work. He drew a circle about the bush, deepening it to make a moat. He filled it with water from a pail and stood up, stretching and holding out his arms to the sun. Per-

haps his mother would like what he had done. Her garden would be blooming to welcome her home. He missed her today, her faint affection, her serene unresponsive presence that somehow belonged to the house and when withdrawn left it lonely—masculine in its solidity of stone and silence.

Now for the seeds. His packages lay heaped on the grass. He opened the sunflowers and filled his palm with large black pips like striped beetles, glossy and tame. He ate one and felt its cheap oily taste spread over his tongue. The wind rose in a sporadic breathing out—as if heaving a sigh at the tree-tops. As the breath passed by, the leaves on the oaks, maples and elms turned over indolently in their sleep.

With an effort at concentration he pulled the rake over the earth to make a long bed for the seeds, dropping in marigold, scabiosa, calendula, that would later make an orgy of peasant colors, orange, red and blue. He mixed poppy seed as fine as sand with sand and for good measure squeezed still another dry flower head into his palm, shaking it for its particles like a salt cellar. Then working down toward the sick Judas tree, he made a furrow for naturtiums and rolled in the seeds, round as peas and corrugated—as if they had grown old and wrinkled while waiting for a rebirth.

His back was aching. He stood up and looked about at the green peace, at the sensitive trees posturing up at the sky. How blue it was today. Blue

serenity for his only free time of the week. The deep color gave him a physical pleasure and he searched critically for flawing clouds without finding anything more than a gradation of blue at the horizon. His morning's work had left him tired and hungry. He hoped that Hannah would call him soon. But the shasta daisies, already dug up for transplanting, were hungry, too. An appetite for new soil. And the geraniums were still to be offered a bright corner. He sighed and lifted a stocky sprout, smelling the pale lancinated leaves, soaked in spicy warmth. There were the forget-me-nots that must have moisture. What they really wanted was a brook or marsh where they could consort in puddles with soggy buttercups. Well, they would have to be satisfied with the pool about whose rim they could form a faint blue circle. Limp plants in hand, he stopped to gaze at the smoothness of the water, like a sheet of wet blue grass laid out to dry. His heart stirred to pain. He always saw his sad and ridiculous childhood when he passed by the pool where he and May had learned to swim. It was from this spot he had watched Erna that night as she dressed in a frame of golden light. It was here he had come the night before May's wedding, hiding from the memory of Erna's face and Sham's, drawn together to smell hyacinths.

Now Hannah was calling him. He heard her worn high voice coming from the back of the house where she was standing on her porch. Moving toward the

house, he rubbed his hands together and felt the dust of dried earth between his fingers, natural, salutary, reassuring, its color like his hands that the sun had browned.

Hannah stopped him on the way to the sink. "It wasn't for lunch I was calling you. It's someone to see you."

He turned and saw Agnes standing by Hannah's side, frail in a black dress, her tenuous face gazing at him in fear and pleasure. "Agnes!" He went to her, holding out his hand. "Oh, I forgot. I can't shake hands. I've been gardening."

She smiled, a trembling movement of her lips. "I——"

"How are you? Where have you been, Agnes?"

"I'm fine, Mr. Doan." Her hands were moving slowly over her cotton dress, up toward her neck, to her shoulders, scarred and discolored fingers picking at the thin black cloth. "I work nearby now. I seen you on the lawn—but I thought——"

His face became grave again as he remembered Mrs. Swift's imperialism. For Agnes the habit of back doors. The lawns for the family and the gardeners. He tried to smile. "Agnes, this time you can stay to lunch. I'm at home here, you know, and I——"

"Oh, I couldn't Mr. Doan. I have to be getting back to the Sandersons to serve the table——"

"Well—" He saw her blush and wondered why. Her wide eyes were watching his face gazing stead-

ily, bright and diffused. He lifted his hands and brushed off the clinging earth so that he might not seem to see her mysterious tears. "Drop in again sometime. I'll be glad—Hannah gets lonesome when the family is in Europe."

"Yes. Yes, I will, Mr. Doan."

He guessed she found it awkward to start away. He turned to the sink and whistled as the cold water poured down his arms. Behind him he heard the voices of the women, low and intimate whisperings. Then steps went past him to the door. He dried his hands on the roller towel and sat down at the table, thinking of Agnes. He wondered how she had happened to find work near by, why she had so hastily come and gone, why there had been tears in her eyes. Perhaps her mother—he had forgotten to ask for her mother.

"Hannah—is Agnes' mother dead?"

"Yes, after a bad spell." Hannah's voice was hushed, as reverent as if the dead woman were still unburied.

"Oh. Did Agnes tell you today?"

"No. Last month when she first came out here."

"But—" He turned in his chair. Hannah's gentle face was nodding in thoughtful melancholy.

She said, "Oh, well, we all have to go one day."

"How did you happen to know Agnes, Hannah? I thought today was the first time——"

"Oh, she's been to see me before. I was going to tell you when you were out to Miss May's wedding

only there was always somebody around. And that night you was in the kitchen you wasn't feeling very well——"

"I was drunk, Hannah."

"I thought you was." She began to laugh and her eyebrows like two black caterpillars, arched their backs. She moved away to the stove, rattling covers and muttering into the steam from her pots. She came back and rested a wet spoon on her hip. "Agnes felt lonesome, I guess. Her brother got in trouble again. They put him in jail after her mother died. She came here one night and asked about you. You had been telling her about me—a lot of nonsense——"

He put out his hand and patted her arm. "I told her you were the only real mother I ever had."

"Go on with you." She smiled down at him, her round eyes active with simian winks. "I told her the Sandersons was wanting a girl. They're not much but they're near by." She coughed and winked at him. "I guess she's been afraid to come since you've been here."

"But, why, Hannah? Why?"

She moved away and he saw her back bulge toward him as she bent to the oven. "Oh, bashful, maybe."

He ate, his eyes on the window to see trees and quiet grass. The curtain by him stiffened in the breeze and raised itself into the room, a white flag beating the air. He smelled cut grass and the scent

of the garden flowers, their odor uncertain in the heat that spread from the oven. He sighed and thought of the afternoon that lay before him and the tranquil night.

"Funny, Hannah. When I was a kid I used to hate Sunday. Now it's my one happy day—here with you in the country."

"Oh, you and your country." He heard her laughing behind him, enjoying the familiar family joke.

"Well, it's all I want. It's all I've got left to want."

She came to his side. "Won't she—won't she never——"

He shook his head. "Never, Hannah. It's all over." His voice was squeezed into a whisper by his throat. Something black and soft fell upon him and enclosed his head, covering his mouth from air. Through it as through a shadow he looked down at his knees and beat them with his fists. The knuckles of his dark hands were like white knobs. His shoulder stung under Hannah's timid fingers. Slowly and with infinite skill the pain knotted his heart and drew it apart, holding it with deliberate force. The sensation of infinity passed over him, torture without end. Then the pain shook itself into a climax and the process of release began. Above his head was the simple rise and fall of Hannah's voice, softening, assuaging. He lifted his hand and laid it on hers.

"Now, now." She whispered over him in small

dry words that were like leaves rustling in his hair. The arms that used to carry him up to bed lay resting on his shoulders, shrivelled now with years and labor.

He drew them away slowly and got up. Pain still prodded him. He moved to the door and drifted out into the sunlight, closing his eyes against it. The brightness pressed upon him as he went down the path to the road. The warm air, stirring against his face, dried his tears. He turned off the broad greasy road and started along a smaller way that had been called "the path" when he was a little boy, before Long Island had been so invaded—raped and populated by the towering city to the north. He and May had played here, raced their ponies between trees and bushes. One night he had led Erna as far as the big stone behind the bend, passing silently through the moonlight, his hand lifting toward her arm, ready to touch it if he found courage. She had seemed to float at his side as objects float in a fever, and the moonlight that pushed through the trees had stained her virginal dress with bands of green. They had turned back at the stone and without touching hands. There it was now, settled in the grass like an old gray tortoise. He was passing it, his feet stepping in swift unsteady rhythms to get him away from that old haze of moonlight and belief. What was love anyway? An ill of civilization. Man had been better off without it, mating like the animals. This love, unnatural and formida-

ble, was either a duty or a torment. People in love were never happy. All great tragedies had been caused by love. His tragedy, too. If he hadn't loved Erna he would have finished college and with a clear head, enmities smoothed by reason, he could have planned out his life instead of being pushed into things. Engineering, for instance. He had had a taste for it and would have gone out west to his father's cousin. An open life of tents in the shadows of mountains, great treks on horseback, food cooked at sunset and flavored with smoke. Peace as clear and cool as the air he would have slept in at night. No Erna to remember. No small tinted face turning its eyes at him inside his head until he wanted to smash his skull against a wall and get rid of it forever.

He hurried on, his arms pressed to his sides to comfort the aching in his chest. The worst of everything was that she still loved him. Not as she had, but enough to have grieved at their parting. And it was the want of money, money that he despised, that had kept their marriage from being what was known as a success. Without it her love hadn't been able to survive. He realized at last the fiberless quality of her emotion for him. Love that in him had hardened into the bones of his true frame, making their essential substance, was in her the insubstantial breath that could draw life from him or from another. It had been he. It would be Sham who made money and danced well. Whom her

mother liked. Well, a divorce would be arranged. It was certain she would marry Sham. He would carry her off—away from her mother. He always had his way. He would manage to be alone with her. It would be on Sham's shoulder she would rest her slippery gold head at night when they came in tired from dancing. Sham's arms would be——

He moaned and walked faster along the shining silent road. He threw out his arms and beat them upon nothing. He stared into the sun until water blinded him—tears that shut out the picture of Sham and Erna, length to length in a new bed. The air he breathed seemed hotter and more dry. He heard the complaint of a bird from the peak of a tree and some small secret creature hurrying under a bush. Far away where the main road crossed the lane a horn touched two major notes in a ritual of warning. The notes sounded in his ears again and again, marking time to his erratic steps. The moisture on his forehead spread, formed drops, trickled down his face. His lips tasted of salt and a layer of stickiness was between his skin and the old gardening shirt. Now when he looked about him he didn't know the lane any longer. This stone wall that made so neat a barricade on either side was new. It hadn't been there the last time he had come. Perhaps he hadn't walked so far. It didn't matter except he must think of something except Erna. That was finished forever. Forever. As if he had put it into a grave. He must plan a new life now. He

thought of his father's office and the line of faces there. How their eyes would roll when they heard the latest gossip—young Mr. Doan's wife married to Roger Wickersham. He couldn't face that. He must find another position. Perhaps under another name. His mouth was parched. His head burned. He turned his eyes from side to side.

The stone wall wasn't there any more. There were high trees, irregular and quiet, a hostile forest that imprisoned him with upright bars. He could get out only by going on and on through the trembling arid air that he drew into him with weak gasps. He was about to drop into dusty grass when he saw just ahead the slope of a roof through the trees. It was a low shingled roof, slanting gently, brown, weather-worn, humble. It disengaged itself from the branches as he advanced, and he saw it crooked protectingly over a small brown house, whose uncurtained windows returned his stare with glazed sleepy eyes. He stopped, brushing the fence with his elbow, to look at the narrow porch that belted the front of the little house with pots of flowers standing together near the door like a colored buckle. Beyond a long green flank for the house, stretched a garden, and it was on this that his eyes went to rest in a drugged and delighted inventory. He noted with slow pleasure each square of emerald, each oblong shape of bluish green, and a line of bronze-colored leaves that ran through the lush. He said to himself, "Peas, cabbages, beets," nodding in

recognition to the patches among posts and wires, curried and patted into impeccable order. Then as he lifted his eyes he saw beyond the garden a greenhouse, opalescent and fragile, with cold-frames clustered in the dark loam about it, placed like mirrors, flat upon the ground. To any other passing eye this modest house and commercial garden would have been just a shabby little truck farm, to be noted, perhaps, if one lived near by and had a taste for fresh vegetables. But to Timothy it gave the sensation of seeing something that was actually beautiful —long desired—a fulfillment of old thoughts. In such a place as this he would have been alone with Erna, working with his hands in the contentment, vague and dark, he always felt when he touched the earth and the things that grew from it. His nostalgia for the soil, his weakness for the placidity of nature that always drove him from the city with covered eyes, now seemed to flow into his sore dry bones as he leaned on the fence, staring and sighing. A dull content moved, became static within him and the pain of his life was like the salty sweat he had worked out of his body, leaving him purified. He gazed at this oasis, calm and fruitful in a sun that nourished without exciting it, and as he absorbed its details a corner of his mind became active. Through it ran the turgid street of his father's office, the black chain of frantic motors, the swarm of pallid workers in the rush for their cells. The collection

of diverse noises rising from the pavements into a roar reproduced itself in his ears. He threw up his arm. "That and then this," he said aloud. "My God." He felt his heart beating against the rail of the fence. He let his arm fall and laid his chin on it.

The door of the house opened and a boy walked across the porch, standing doubtfully on the steps. He was tall and tanned to the color of a young chestnut. His blue eyes seemed almost white in contrast with his smooth burned skin. He came down the steps and toward the fence, moving over the grass slowly and seeming to Timothy only a continuation of his sense of miracle and mirage.

"Hello." The boy smiled. His bare feet made two thick wedges of flesh on the rough grass.

Timothy's head fell back on his arms. "Could I have a drink of water?" He closed his eyes and waited, hanging to the fence until the boy returned.

"All in?"

Timothy gulped down the water, nodding. "I guess I walked too far."

"Where from?" The boy's light eyes opened, eager to hear the tale of a great adventure.

"From the bay—almost."

"Oh." He seemed disappointed. "That's not far. Only eight miles."

"I'm not used to walking."

"You'd better come in and rest. My uncle is laid

up with a broken leg." He opened the gate and waved his arm toward the garden. "I've had everything to do by myself."

Timothy smiled at the pride that dominated this complaint. "But you like it—the work?"

The boy moved his shoulders as they went up the steps. "Oh I don't mind. Except I'm missing the last of school."

They entered the house and Timothy stopped inside the door, waiting while the boy went forward into the room. He began to think how he must look, without coat or hat, his pale face running with sweat. The man sitting at the window among scattered newspapers would think him deranged. He was surprised to see him smile from his chair, an oldish man with a brown face and a kind mouth. His gesture of welcome was dignified and he brought his hand down to his knee, tapping it and indicating his foot which was stretched out to another chair.

"Excuse me. I can't get up. But come in. Come in. Get a chair, Eddie."

"I—was looking at your garden."

"Yes," said the old man. "I saw you from the window. Thought you might be wanting some salad greens—or some rose slips."

"We got some nice rhubarb," said Eddie. "Uncle Fred, he walked over here from the bay."

"Well—kind of hot, wasn't it?"

Timothy smiled at the healthy old face, work-worn and resting, its expression of curiosity smooth-

ing out the folds in the skin, revealing lines of white flesh that the sun hadn't been able to find through the protective furrows around the eyes. A musty smell pervaded the house—an old-fashioned odor of yellow soap, Sunday tobacco, and winter stoves that still held the cinders of their last fire. Timothy sniffed this interior country air with pleasure. It was wholesome and primitive, a homely smell of simplicity like the lives of these crude workers in satisfying soil.

"I'm Frederick Kramer and this is my nephew, Eddie." The eyes asked a question from the chair by the window and the voice was lifted and expectant.

"My name is Timothy Doan," said Timothy faintly. He waited for Mr. Kramer to draw a long breath and burst out about his father. People always did that.

"That so?" Mr. Kramer filled his pipe. "Guess I used to see you running around when you was a little shaver. Used to drive past your house most every day. I was in the delivery business then with Hoffmaker."

"Were you?" said Timothy politely. His shoulders, relaxing, pressed against the cloth back of his chair.

"Been raising for the markets for six years now —since my wife died. But I'm getting on now. And with this leg—" He tapped his thigh with his pipe stem. "Guess I'll be selling out pretty soon.

My son sort of wants me to come out to Buffalo."

He lighted a match and put the triangle of flame at the bowl. Bitter smoke rose in the air, spread slowly with a beautiful floating motion, reaching Timothy's face without haste or purpose. The empty window by the old man's head suddenly filled with sunlight.

Timothy moved. "I must be getting back."

"You haven't made much of a visit," said Mr. Kramer. "Better go out with Eddie while he gets out the car and look the place over. You might see something you want."

"My family is away. But I'll take some rhubarb and a lettuce," said Timothy.

Mr. Kramer lowered his pipe and looked at him. "Didn't I see something in the papers about your getting married?"

"Yes." Timothy left his chair and turned to the door.

"I said to myself, 'Well, only the other day he was playing near the road with a fire engine and now he'll soon be having kids of his own.'"

"Thank you for letting me rest." Timothy crossed the room and shook the strong twisted hand. "I must be starting now. It's a long walk back."

"Oh, Eddie's going to run you back."

"Thanks." Timothy hesitated, looking down at the burnt bald head. "But I don't want to give you all that trouble."

"Eddie'll be glad to have the run. And say—if

you hear of anyone wanting my little place—" He turned his head to the window and sent out a glance of pride and regret to his fields. "It's a good paying little proposition if it's treated right. Of course four acres isn't much——"

Timothy gazed at him. A little knob of excitement rose in his throat. He swallowed it but it popped back and clung. The sun rushed in through the window with a wild brightness and disclosed him. He felt the most important object in the room, the center of something enormous and epochal. "How much—would you want for your place?" As he waited for the reply he felt as if he himself had not spoken, but some exterior person that had entered into him.

Mr. Kramer's lips shot out. He sucked air between them in a small hissing sip. "Well, I've been wanting to figger that out a little before I advertise. There's the house—six rooms—telephone—and the ground—and there's the——"

Timothy's eyes drank sparkling green from the window as from a chalice. The grass and moving trees seemed to blend together into a vast sea, green and bright, that pressed toward him in undulating masses. Through this verdure that belonged only to him rays from the sun splashed and played, pushed against his hot staring eyes. Beams entered his mind, forming minute plans that he considered with an interior glance and forgot as they exploded with a snap against his inner ear. Mr. Kramer

talked on, an endless distant drone like a prophecy that knew its own importance. It wandered into the room, full and lazy, a cadence of cataloguing and recapitulation, addressed to the pale good-looking son of the pre-eminent maker of solid hosiery.

"——so I thought maybe six thousand dollars would be about right."

"Yes," said Timothy slowly. He let his hand fall from the back of his chair and stood erect. "Well——"

His eyes closed, opened again on the window. The sea had dried to an unkempt lawn. The trees had stepped apart and now held their old places in the burning afternoon sky. The air had a thin feeling of lateness, yet it was still early. He looked away. The same deception in everything. For instance, how old he felt, being so young. And how much he desired, being helpless. Such desire should live with power. He brought his hands together, tore them apart. He would find a way. He must.

"Well," he repeated. "In case I hear of anything ——" They shook hands a second time. The old man's fingers were hard and knotty in his palm.

Outside the air was like a warm shallow lake, clear and blue. Three white chickens, bonneted in red, jerked their necks at him as he came down the steps and warned each other with faint domestic clucks in harem-like camaraderie. Eddie was calling to him from the road. He passed through the gate and stepped into the chugging car.

"I put your lettuce and rhubarb in the back," said Eddie. He laughed and they started down the road. "Don't often carry such a small order."

Timothy watched the trees change their places in the sky. His heart beat slowly in dark weighted thuds. The torrent of his excitement had thinned to a small quiet stream. It pushed quietly through his veins, deep, purposeful, warming. It fed his muscles as if it carried, like blood, nourishment against fatigue. He rested his chin on his breast. In all his depths, those dark impenetrable places that could suffer without knowing why, he felt an assurance of peace and accomplishment. As if his future were already his past for surety of knowledge, he knew that at last he was going to have what he wanted.

XVII

HANNAH was rocking herself on the back porch, singing quietly, without tune. Timothy watched her from the door. Her blue sack-like dress, striped with white, billowed and flattened in the breeze of her motions. Her loosened grey hair made a decoration in travesty for her flat broken profile. Her eyes, sunken and sad, fixed themselves in vacant interest on the vegetable garden. He listened to the words of her inharmonious song, always the same since his childhood, her only companion in work or rest. "There is a fountain filled with blood that flows from Emmanuel's veins." A terrible song, he used to think, that had frightened him as he repeated it before going to sleep. A fountain filled with blood. He had seen it, red and gushing, warm and sending out a thick pink steam. But Hannah seemed never to have considered its meaning, lost through daily use. It was her march, her opera, her lullaby. Her mouth sagged now and she sang, "Eman—uel's ve-ei-eins," rocking slowly to give the cadences their decorous ending.

Timothy opened the door and came out. He sat down near her knees and let his feet dangle down

over the edge of the porch. The air, cooler now, waved against his face. He breathed it in, a long sigh, and twisted about to look up at her.

"Well! Where have you been?" She pretended sharpness, but smiled down at him, pleased that he was near her.

"Oh, I took a walk." He leaned against her knees and rested his head. "Miles and miles. I found you some lettuce and rhubarb."

She sat motionless, her knees steady for his head. "Did you, now?"

Her familiar bulk behind him seemed part of his dark life that stretched back into shadows so distant that he could no longer remember their vague forms. She had lifted him from them when he had been left alone, crying in darkness. Her love had never failed to support and comfort him and his childhood had been nourished by her. She knew, blindly and understandingly, all the things he had forgotten and everything that had happened in the house before his birth. She could explain to him, had she the use of words, how his mother had been made submissive to his father and indifferent to her son. Many other things. Well, they didn't matter now. In the contact with her devoted body, tired and old, his own felt freshened, less depleted, strengthened by the stability of her love.

"Hannah, I want to ask you—today I saw a market garden. A little place one man and a boy can run. It pays—even in the winter, with the green-

houses. It's for sale. Six thousand dollars, the man said." He broke off, setting his back hard against her knees. His hope and the purpose that had founded it, hardened again. "Hannah, I've just *got* to have that garden." He turned about, bringing up his long legs, until he faced her with his lips set into firm and bitter lines. "Except for Erna, this is the only thing I've ever wanted in my life. And some way—I don't know how—I'm going to get it."

She gazed down at him and her face began to settle into immobility. Behind the glazed outer skin of her eyeballs thoughts seemed to start into activity with an effort that was grinding and painful. Her gaze expanded, swelled out at his face, held it to hers as if he could aid her striving. Then her lids stirred with tremors and her narrow forehead gathered itself into the wrinkles that it wore when it was time to lift a lid or peer into her oven—the corrugations of her life's small crises. She gave his shoulder a little push.

"Go on with you and your country! Can't you never think of nothing but vegetables and flowers?"

He shook his head. "I could make good with that garden, Hannah. I know I could."

"I guess maybe you could, too." She patted his shoulder reflectively. "It's a funny life for you to be wanting. And what will your father say?"

He closed his teeth. "I'm going to live as I want to. I've tried business and I hate it. I'd be a clerk all my life and hating myself. Why should I,

Hannah?" He clasped her knees and shook them. "You think I'm right, don't you? Shouldn't I do what I want? I'm past twenty-one—if I don't start being happy pretty soon——"

She accepted his painful embrace of her knees, embarrassed by the emotion of his appeal. She said simply, "I guess maybe you should." Then she pushed him away. "My sakes! don't be mussing up my Sunday dress."

He smiled at her faintly. "Say, Hannah, if I ever make enough money on my garden you could come live with me. I mean, if you don't go to Ireland."

Her long face smoothed out into sadness. Her eyes, brown and gentle, looked out from him into the sky. "I guess I won't be going to Ireland. I've given up the idea lately."

He laughed. "Oh, I knew you'd never go, Hannah."

"I guess maybe home's the best place for old folks," she said.

Home. Poor old Hannah's vicarious home, he thought, gazing at her mild old face. Regret passed through him like a chill. Perhaps this woman who loved him should have been his mother. Or else it ought to be his mother who sat here, listening to him and helping him to his decisions. As much as he loved Hannah he knew that his love was only a substituting tenderness. As hers was for him. He thought of her lover who had died and another

whom she had sent away, preferring a solitary life and unmarred memories. Then the egoism of his youth burst out again, more pressing than a review of Hannah's past.

"Hannah! Help me think. How am I going to get that farm?"

"Oh, you!" She lifted his arms from her knees and got out of the chair. In the tepid quiet air that hung over them he heard her breathing. "More bother than you're worth. Now don't go away for another walk till I come down."

She went into the house with a slap of the door. Her soft shoes padded toward the stairs. He closed his eyes to plan, to think. What can I sell? Seven suits, two watches, studs and cuff links. The ring Uncle Peter left me in his will. That lot out west. The old car in the back of the garage. Junk. Not a thousand dollars for it all. I bet grandfather is smiling in his grave. A triumph for him for the money I left lying in Wall Street.

He twisted his hands and pressed them to his forehead. Overhead by the open window of Hannah's room he heard the thud of her steps, her heavy movements. Something opened—shut again. The west before his eyes was glowing. An inflamed light that merely by its vigor seemed to have pulled up the trees behind the garage—branches pressing up against a fever.

Hannah came out. Her face caught the light from the sky and turned it to his eyes. She seemed

to have absorbed it into her flesh, given up her scarred skin to it. Her look was keen with eagerness—almost a predatory appetite in her eyes. Holding out her hand as she came, she sat down heavily and thrust out a worn brown book, thin and crumpled at the edges.

"Here. I'm never going to Ireland now. It's too far—I'd be afraid, I guess."

He stared at the book. "What—what do you mean, Hannah?"

"Now don't give me any arguments. I'd never be using it all and that's the end of it."

The thin little book lay in his palm softly. Hannah's bank book. She put out her hand and turned its pages under his eyes. They were filled with scratchings in ink of many shades. Entries from years ago, month after month. Her pointless dark nail found a total and hovered over it.

"There's more than you'll be needing. Enough for both of us. I've never been one to spend much."

The figures wavered, swelled before his tears. "Oh, Hannah! As if I'd take your—Oh, Hannah!" He seized her hand. "I couldn't."

"Don't be acting foolish. I don't need it. And when your garden gets going good you can pay it all back to me. I got faith in you if the rest of them ain't. You always seemed more like a—like a son to me—if you'll excuse me saying it——"

He jumped up and threw his arms about her, sliding down on her knees. His face lay on her

straggling hair. "Thank you—as much as if I could take it."

"Course you're going to take it." She sat passive and shy in his embrace. "It's like an investment. Didn't you say you knew you could make good?"

"I know, Hannah. But not with your savings." His tears trickled into her hair.

She began to cry, too, with peasant sympathy. "It's awful when you get old and nobody belongs to you," she said. "I've had you ever since you was a baby. I've done more for you in some ways than anybody. You're all I've got."

Her arms, tough and stiff, pressed him to her old fruitless breasts. Quietly they looked at the sky. Its fire warmed her age and incited his thoughts. A bird flew near them, circled twice, called and soared. It became a single eyebrow on the red featureless sky. He frowned up at it, thoughts leaping and falling in his head. His eyes closed, numb lids shutting out the aching brightness that was preparing the night. His head dropped heavily to Hannah's shoulder with relief and confidence.

"Maybe I ought—" His voice, drowsy and soft, felt weighted in his throat. "Hannah, I guess I'd better go over there early in the morning so nobody will get ahead of me."

"That's right." Her arms gave him a squeeze of triumph. They held him close, then fell away. "Now get off my lap." She pushed him up and stood, shaking out her dress. "I got the supper to

cook. I s'pose you don't want to go to bed hungry just because you're going in business for yourself."

Her resilient eyebrows wavered on her forehead. Shaking her head and muttering, she started for the kitchen, smoothing down the wrinkles he had made in her striped Sunday dress.

XVIII

On misty days when he raised his eyes from his garden and looked to the north he saw a brown smudge hanging over the horizon that he thought might be New York. He could have found out by asking Eddie but after all he didn't really care to know. New York was as far from him now as his old home that lay only a few miles to the east. Isolated from the main road and enclosed safely by fields and a stretch of trees, he might as well have settled down in Arkansas for all the contact he felt with things that had once been his familiar life. When he turned to gaze in the direction of the big stone house where he had been born, he felt an estrangement that was complete and renunciatory. He wondered why he didn't feel like a prisoner or a monk, enclosed into a few hundred square feet for life, instead of having in his tired body the sensation of freedom—of escape. He was safe here. No one could get him back. Not his father. Not Mrs. Swift.

He often imagined the situation, should they arrive to tear him off his land. And, putting himself into this scene like the protagonist in a drama

who must discover means to outwit the fate that finds him out, he would plant his feet firmly into his garden and feel with mounting passion the motion of his struggle. They, two in number with the names of the rest of the family in their mouths as if to evoke a shadowy company behind them, would shout their arguments, worldly and logical. Against them, he would stammer the story of his content, back of him and flooding into him the great primitive passion of his land. *His* property where they were trespassers. And in these imaginary storms of will, their figures would grow smaller and dimmer before his eyes until they dispersed in the mist that clung to his garden and he found himself standing idle before a post he had been mending in his fence.

In the hours he could spare from the routine of the garden he made small repairs in the house, and whitewashed the glass of the greenhouses to protect his young plants from the sun that was growing hotter with the advancing season. Eddie said that the year before his uncle had waited until the first week in June, for it had been cold and rainy. This would be a good summer, he thought. "You're lucky, Mr. Doan. Just wait till you get nothing but rain and cutworms. You won't think it's such a grand life then." Eddie couldn't understand the plodding and enthusiastic devotion that drove Timothy from bed in time to see the rim of the sun arching up beyond the furthest trees. When the

boy would hurry, whistling down the road, Timothy would have been out for hours between the rows of vegetables, searching out their growth, tending their maturity. Then if there had been no rain for two or three days, Eddie would drag out the hose and the long day would begin. Fresh through its first hours, it would gather red ardor until the sun in a frenzy of power drove its heat into the earth with passionate relief, and the sweating bodies of the two workers struggled not to droop under the burning monotony that attacked them.

One late afternoon they were hoeing between the tomato plants. Timothy finished his row and stopped to mop his face and stretch his back. Leaning on his hoe he smelled the gross fennel odor of the brittle plants—a smell like a warning. No wonder tomatoes had been pronounced a fruit of poison in the old days, he thought. Love apples. He pushed up his hat and made a long survey of that corner of the garden, waiting for Eddie, a few rows away, to come down to him. His eyes, dark with fatigue, closed a little as he raised his head into the blazing light and through the hedge of his lashes he saw the accomplishment of many days, now a unit of soft brown earth, prepared for a harvest of succulent bulbs.

"Looks pretty well, doesn't it?"

"Yep," said Eddie. He passed an expert's eyes over the rows of delicate green tufts. He, too, rested on his hoe, drawing long breaths of hot afternoon

air that rose from the soil and trembled between their faces. "Better'n last year. You work longer hours than my uncle." He smiled, his light eyes drawing up at their corners. "Say, you *like* it, don't you?"

Timothy nodded. "Yes. I like it."

"I should think you'd miss the city. Don't you get lonesome nights after I go home? Reading a book and going to bed isn't much fun. Why, you could be going to theatres if you wanted to."

Timothy pulled down his hat. Its sweaty brim felt cool on his hot forehead. He moved away, grasping his hoe. "I'm too tired for that."

"So'm I tired. But you bet I'd go if I got the chance. Don't you care anything about movies—or dancing?"

"Oh, they're all right. I used to go." He struck at the earth and began to scrape it. Pebbles rolled at his feet, covered with moist soil like nuts in chocolate.

He began to move away from Eddie's curiosity, his questions that somehow were an echo of Erna. As he turned back the baked surfaces he fought against thoughts of her. How she had danced in his arms, pressed against him, her shining perfumed head bent to his lips. How in the theatres she had slipped her hand into his when the lights dimmed, inclined against his shoulder while he watched her innocent profile, the lips parting with her excited breath, her eyes wide and wistful. He squeezed his

lips together and shut his teeth. Mustn't think of her. Mustn't think of anything but my work. Thoughts of last year like weeds. Pull them up. Don't think. Don't think.

But blood had risen to feed his head, animating his mind. The bright disk of Erna's face seemed to be stenciled in a ring about the top of his brain, masks on the border of a room. Each face shone out separately, differently, tenderness impressed on this one, a remoteness on that. There was her faltering smile, like an unsure child. Next to it, a sharpness taken from her mother. He was in for it now, he thought, and waited for a rocking agony to shake his heart, a spasm of grief for her that might send him running into the house from Eddie's eyes, maimed for an hour on his bed. He never could tell when this was going to happen to him. It might be at sunrise after a night of dreaming, standing before the stove to cook his breakfast, that the pain would seize his heart like a cramp and bend him over a chair. Sometimes in the greenhouses it had burst over him like a shell, devastating enough to have smashed all the small poised panes overhead, sending him to his knees with an arm across his eyes.

Now, his hoe dragging at his hand, he tried to close his clear interior eye against the frieze of faces, all so entirely hers. If only he need not see them for a moment. If only his heart might not guess he was looking at them. New moisture was

soaking into his shirt and the air next his body was hot and humid. His arms pulled in a fury of motion, throwing back the hoe, pulling it toward him. Eddie's voice, calling sharply, fell into his ears like a dart. He pretended he had not heard. No more talk of theatres and dancing that evoked what he must not think of. Bed the earth, freshen it, turn it over like a dark sheet. Pull hard, chop that lump, pat it down, pull again, don't think, don't think.

Eddie ran to him, leaping over the rows. "Say —a lady—she's been standing up there waiting. Maybe she wants to buy something, but she didn't come in an auto."

Timothy sheltered his eyes, gazing toward the house through the golden glare. A narrow dark figure, as still against the brightness as a black-robed madonna on mosaics of gold, waited on the edge of the field. Agnes in her black cotton dress, standing shelterless in the sun. He threw up his arm to greet her. She did not move but remained poised on the edge of the grass, her face turned toward him, made blind and featureless by distance.

He started up the rows, feeling at each step his feet sink into the earth he had just softened, and as he lifted them with effort he thought that for the first time he had escaped from his heart—from the consequence of Erna's face living on in his mind. It had left him for a time like a guest gone out to investigate the neighborhood after tea. And the return would be at sundown. Eddie gone, the house

silent and filled only by his small light, Erna's face would glow on the room like another lamp, and his heart would tremble and jump in its cage until he would close the door behind him and stumble down the black path, to be calmed at last by the multitude and distance of the colorless cold stars.

"How nice of you to come and see me," he called to Agnes and, walking more quickly, reached her and took her hand. "I'm awfully glad you came. I haven't seen anyone for weeks—except Hannah." He laughed, embarrassed, and explained, "No one knows I'm here, of course. But I'm glad Hannah told *you.*"

"Yes."

Her voice seemed a whisper in the stillness. They looked at each other, waiting. Her eyes fell to his hands, as hard and dark as if they had been carved from wood. Smiling, he turned them palms up to show her their swollen broken callouses.

"I've been working hard, Agnes."

"Yes," she repeated. Her pale face came up slowly to his eyes. It had a sequestered look, he thought, as if it had been closed away from the sun and summer winds. She said, "I don't want to be keeping you from your work. I was—I was taking a walk— I haven't any place now. The Sandersons went to the mountains Monday."

"You'll have to find another, then."

"I suppose so. I have to work."

"So have I, Agnes. But I'm not going back to

an office again. I'm going to live here—maybe always." He watched her eyes open, puzzled but unquestioning. He smiled and pointed to the house and the gardens beyond it. "Come see my place."

They walked over the grass and he began to talk rapidly, explaining what he had done and what he would do, the fruit trees he was going to plant, over there another greenhouse, a laundry he himself would build with Eddie's help before school began. He would have chickens, perhaps pigeons and three geese. If he made enough money he would buy two or three more acres that were for sale across the road. In a year or two if things went well, he would have still other greenhouses and two men to help him. But of course it would take time to expand.

Agnes listened with an entranced pale face bent toward the grass. She admired his plans and praised his lively plants, early cucumbers, still in the greenhouse and fattening under the steady sun that poured upon them day after day until under this intensive heat they turned a deep unfeeling green, small money-colored gourds, hard and swollen.

"Hannah said you'd make good." She looked at him clearly, meeting his eyes at last and the faint trembling of her blood pressed up into her cheeks. As if she feared even so little a flush appearing on her face, she turned and went through the low door. "It's hot in here."

He followed her from the greenhouse, and they

stopped to stand under a maple tree's ruffled branches that shed a pale green light over them. He watched her color fall, change subtly in the new clear light that was like a shadow on a pool. Her large unhappy eyes fixed themselves into space and he saw they were lying in two hollows of shaded flesh.

"You're thin, Agnes."

"Am I?" She turned as if he had startled her. "It's the kitchen, I guess. The cook left last week."

They moved toward the house and went to sit on the porch. He brought her a chair and a pitcher of cold water from the kitchen.

"Take off your hat, Agnes."

"No."

"You must."

She smiled faintly and he drew it from her hair. Their hands touched and she started. He heard her draw a sharp breath. He moved away to his chair. Dusty and black, her hat lay on her knees and she slipped her large ugly hands beneath its brim in a secretive gesture. A slow wind blew steadily across the garden and stirred the feathery mass of her black hair. It dried the moisture on her forehead and left it smooth and transparent. Her shy stiff body relaxed. She seemed to draw ease from staring at the pots of flowers before the door and when he held her glass out, she accepted it without awkwardness and drank with naïve thirst like a peasant.

He filled his glass and turned it in his hands to

feel the solace of its chill on his smarting palms. His eyes went from Agnes to the distant figure in the fields, small and moving its arms with the mechanical jerks of a toy on strings.

"Who's that?" she asked.

"Eddie Kramer. I bought the place from his uncle when he went to Buffalo. He's going to work for me till school opens."

He looked into her glass. "You don't get lonesome then."

"Well—Eddie goes home at six o'clock every night."

"Oh! Then you do——"

She broke off and moved in her chair. As if she had just remembered her worn dusty shoes, she drew them back under her, sitting forward and seeming to study the spread of the old elm that sheltered the front of the dried brown house.

He lifted the empty pitcher and ran his fingers in and out of the smooth cold handle. The glass was like the forehead of Agnes—smooth and cold, white and transparent. A dogged content entered into him as he watched her thin face. The quiet of her presence rested him as if he had slept away the fatigue of his labor. He saw her eyes upon the shape of the elm, the puzzled line that had come to crease her forehead.

"What is it, Agnes? What are you thinking about?"

She began to blush. "I was wondering if you'd let me stay and get your dinner. I could walk over after and get the train——"

"But, Agnes—you must be tired."

"No. I've been resting all today."

"Well, if you think—" He jumped up, smiling and excited. "It would be wonderful to have you stay for dinner. I've been lonesome, I guess. You're—you're a peach, Agnes. Then I'll go out and work a while longer if you're going to stay."

She smiled at him with evasive eyes, her flush spreading up to cover her forehead. She watched him spring down the steps, and when he waved from the field she lifted her arm in response and turned into the house.

. . . . .

He drove her to the train in the moonlight along a road that was like a green groove between the trees. The branches moved slightly in the cool moist air, waving slowly like growths under the sea. They laid sharp shadows across the green dust. Agnes shivered in her thin dress. She sat close to his shoulder, warm in its sweater, and bent her head. He felt her tremulous against him as he sent the little car rushing along the verdant road. Deep in him an instinct stirred, spread upward into his thoughts, crept down again and joined the stream of his blood. Did Agnes care for him? Was it that her white apprehensive face had been telling him whenever it

had taken courage to turn toward his eyes? Did she love him? How stupid he had been not to have seen it before. That was why she had gone to see Hannah. Why she had come to work in a house near by and left it when he was no longer there. It was because she loved him that she had come today —not to take a walk. He might have known she wouldn't have been walking for any other reason in that lost corner of Long Island. Poor Agnes.

Filled with the magnitude of his discovery, his heart tender for her pain, he tried to see her face, bowed under the dusty hat. He had an impulse to speak out, to tell her of Erna and how he had suffered. To ask her if it was true that she loved him. But he turned back to his wheel. It would only frighten her. She might begin to weep and throw herself into his arms—or even out of the car. He must pretend that he had noticed nothing. But as they streamed through the pale light, the cool silence about them like the embrace of flowing water, he was conscious of her thin body that palpitated beside him. For the first time he thought of her as a girl of flesh—flesh that was warm beneath its chill, trembling and thinking of love-caresses. She excited his body, long dormant, and this emotion horrified his mind. A memory of his father woke, unknown for nearly a year. He saw again the enormous face, filled with blood, the eyes closing with middle-aged passion as he dropped his great head to the face of Mrs. Hunt. He felt

again his young shudder of disgust as he had turned away, unseen, from the door. My God! am I growing to be like father?

He was relieved to see the dark shed of the country station. He stopped the car and jumped down. "Here we are, Agnes."

She looked down at him and he saw her eyes were blank with tears. She ignored his hand and stepped to the ground. They stood together on the platform without speaking and he walked with her to the steps of the train.

"Thank you, Agnes. I hope— Come and see me again soon, won't you?"

He hadn't meant to ask her but her face, pale and stricken in the white lights about them, drew the words from his mouth. He waited and waved to her window as the train moved smoothly away, leaving him perplexed and solitary, pained for her and amazed at himself. He was going on twenty-two and he had never known until tonight that a man could love one woman and at the same time wish to put his arms about another.

XIX

Timothy pulled weeds from the baked earth, wrenching out their stringy roots which clung in the loam like fingers of fine hemp. His back no longer ached now through the afternoons that stretched longer and longer through the specious month of June. His body, adjusted to its work, felt like a machine in impacable order that ran all day without faltering and quieted into rest at night, as dumb and unconscious as if it were made of lifeless metallic cells. Lean and inured, he crept along his garden, discerning all green growths that were not of his planting. A warm serenity possessed him, a drugging of flesh and spirit by physical strivings. He felt with the sensation of hearing music the harmony of hills, the tones of fundamental fields, and he, the auditor, calm and basic, gladly bereft of cities and their rebellion against simplicity. He raised his head from a heap of uprooted green and looked over to the trees. He noted the sun's angle from under the brim of his torn straw hat and made a gesture of reception at the sky. A small white cloud like a powder puff was moving over the hem of bright branches. He watched it drift on an invisible cur-

rent, spread, change its form with calm resolution. The resemblances hardened, misted into illusion, drew together again. Now it was an airship, then a reclining man, large enough to be going to Olympus. Next it parted and in the fancy of its division became a dog that chased a clumsy cart.

He bent to his work. How fast weeds grew in a garden that must be kept immaculate of everything but fertilizer and plants. Weeds were the curse of a garden, maledictions in green leaves. As he closed his fingers to pull he saw that his hand was thrust into a shadow that lay across the rows. He looked up quickly. Standing over him was a small shabby man with weak eyes and a cringing mouth, staring down at him. He began to blink and his lips, a pale slit like a wound that had not healed after bleeding, moved back from broken yellow pegs.

"Hello," said Timothy. "What do *you* want? Vegetables?"

"No," said the little man. He began to blink again. His eyes ran from Timothy's face to the ground, darted at the trees, rolled back to his feet. "Guess you don't remember me," he said with a pallid grin. "And our little run-in one night." His voice was high, whiny on thin cords.

Timothy got to his feet. He fastened his eyes to the bony face, its drawn skin like old milk, thin and blue. The Swift kitchen, this man on the floor beneath his weight, frightened Agnes coming bare-

foot down the stairs in her nightdress. "I remember you. What do you want?"

The man scraped his feet and his eyes went roaming over the field. "I just got out a couple of days ago. I got a message for Agnes from her brother. He'll be in a while yet and wants some things. Where's Agnes?"

"I don't know." Timothy felt bewildered, drawn into a current. "I haven't seen her for a week. Doesn't her brother know where her room is?"

"Nope." The man shook his head and it bobbed on his frail neck like a top-heavy toy on a spring.

"How did you know I was here?"

"The woman over to your house. The cook. When I said it was for Agnes, she told me it was kinda private that you was here."

"Yes," said Timothy shortly. "It is."

"Well, I ain't saying nothin'." He hung his head and looked down at his shoes. Under the broken leather lay strips of grey skin. He coughed and spat.

Timothy shuddered. There was a pause. A blue-jay dipped down at the end of the field, policing his stretch of fence, coarse and alluring in his uniform, service stripes on his wings. The man stared at him without interest.

He said, "How are you getting along?"

"Fine," said Timothy. The man offended him by his uncleanliness, his acrid odor, the horror of his

disease. He would have liked to tell him to go. But the eyes were too sunken, the bony frame of his body too whipped. He could only stand looking away.

"Any money in it?"

"Enough. If you don't want too much."

"I couldn't stand it," said the man. "I'd get the creeps." He pulled at his hat with a hand like a claw, a talon of dried bones. "Well, so long. Good luck to you. Say—" He brought a bit of paper from his rags. "If you see her will you give her this? Then she could write me a postcard at my sister's."

Timothy took the paper. "All right. If she comes out again."

The man's mouth spread its line across his face in a good-natured leer. "That's funny. Her brother said she'd be sure to be hanging around you. He said she was always talking about her Mr. Doan." He jerked his hat again and turned away toward the road.

Timothy stood with open mouth, rooted to the ground. Her Mr. Doan! He watched the man shambling across the field with small hunted steps, like a sick animal hurrying away to die in safety. He saw him turn at the fence, sidle at the gate and stand aside for a man in grey. The postman. His heart bounded. His mouth closed with a snap. What could he be bringing? A letter, of course. But from whom? He began to run.

The sunlight seemed to redden and beat the air

with vibrant waves as he held out his hand for the letter. I'm a fool, he thought. I can't stop being a damned fool. As if Erna would know where I am! He stared at the envelope. His name in Hannah's writing. Slowly he tore it open. A letter from Paris was enclosed. From his mother on cream-colored paper, embossed with the name of the Hotel Ritz.

He went over into the shade of the elm tree. Sitting on the grass he read it, written perhaps as his mother looked out on the Place Vendôme, gray and damp in the perpetual Paris mists that he remembered. She said she was well. That his father was well but couldn't stand the French coffee. He was talking every day about getting back to the office. She had driven out to Fontainebleau and St. Denis with the Taylors. She hoped he was well and working hard. There was nothing about Erna. She had heard nothing, apparently. Perhaps now, ten days later, she had had the news and was grieving in her own unvital way. The letter slipped down on the grass. Dimly he recalled its origin, the famous hotel for the rich in whose corridors he had sometimes played when he was a little boy. He thought of his mother installed in her suite, the packages that would be arriving for her late in the afternoons, and how he had often been allowed to open them and touch durable satin, gray plumes, and modest furs. He thought of the parades through the tea-room, the dinners beginning with caviar, the

colors of the wines that he might perhaps just taste if he would promise to be silent and not annoy his father. All those foreign flourishes in which moneyed Americans indulge when they take their spasms of travel on the Continent.

He retrieved the letter and passed his fingers over it, folding and refolding it until it was a paper stick in his hands. There were his parents, here was he. The Ritz and his market garden. While they saw their solid friends in motors and tea rooms, he did the work of a farm hand and consorted with servants and a convict. Although he was well hidden from everyone that had tried to change his life and ideas, pushing him helplessly about as if he were still a child to be directed, he was not escaping wholly from exterior influences. His short peace was already invaded. Agnes was in his life now whether he liked it or not. He had to give her his thoughts, his consideration, because he had been kind to her and, she, for some reason, thought she loved him. It was an obligation. He found himself anxious about her, began to reproach himself that he had not asked where she lived and how. Why hadn't she come again? He had asked her to, even while telling himself it would be better if she didn't. And, worse, he had had a burglar for a caller, a man who seemed to know what Agnes felt for him. Again he was among pressures, complications. He didn't know how to remove them for tranquillity's sake or how to deal with them—any more than he had known

how to manage his position in the Swift household. Perhaps only selfish people, ruthless and aggressive, knew the secret of extrication. Sighing, he put the letter into his pocket and leaned back against the tree.

Eddie was calling from the edge of the field, his arms loaded with green bundles. Timothy waved his arm and let it fall. He thought that was symbolical of his character. I always make some kind of consenting gesture and then wait for someone else to carry on the plot. The passivity of a fool who believes the world is going to leave him alone, he thought. Well, it hadn't and it probably wouldn't. Even monasteries had their intrigues and only a hermit might expect to avoid the cabals and contacts of the world—life. But who would wish to sit in a cave all day in terror of a passing footstep? I'll have to make the best of whatever comes my way. Stand the gaff, Sham used to say. But what shall I do about Agnes if she comes again? My God! I'm not supposed to marry her, am I? A jailbird for a brother-in-law!

Eddie drove by, shouting words he couldn't hear. He nodded and settled back against the elm. The sun was spreading wings of fiery feathers, poised across a limitless sky. The sanguinary plumage spread upward, strong and tense, presaging continuously the gigantic dip it would soon be making—a dive underneath the rolling earth in which the bright pinions would brush all color from the heavens,

leaving them clear for the stars to shine through. And over the fields the thin white moon, useless as yet, was waiting for its place—humbly, almost secretly, yet with the dignity of a vocation, as a lamplight knows his importance in the neighborhood.

Timothy shook himself from his reverie and went about his tasks. He fed the chickens, brought in the hoes and rakes. He watered the flowers, thinking there was always something to do to a garden. It was like a baby. He looked over its soft brown surfaces, striped with green and now giving off the ruddy glow they were receiving from the sky. A sturdy pride in his fields moved in him, parental and brooding. He almost wished his mother could see them, prospering and vital from his care. Of course, it wasn't much to have done. His mother wouldn't think so. Still, he hadn't failed. And if he had lost his grandfather's money, at least, by God, he wasn't going to lose Hannah's.

He wandered finally into the house. The bare hall received his steps with lonely resignation. He was grateful for the routine that would occupy him with its dull details. After dinner over a book he would drop into a daze and then, half stupefied, stumble up to bed. He went toward the kitchen. The air was cool in the house, heavier—as if packed with silence. And in his isolation he was the only one to disturb the order of its layers, its tight tiers

of quiet. He sighed and opened the kitchen door. If Eddie brought back the car in time he would invite him to stay for——

His hand dropped from the knob and he stopped short in the half-closed door. "Agnes!"

She stood by the table, a blue bowl in her hands, her face averted, bending aside from him as if he were a strong wind pushing at her from the door. As he did not move, she raised her eyes, put down the bowl and made a stiff gesture. "I—I—thought I'd come and get your supper—if you don't mind."

"Mind, Agnes?" He came to the table, holding out his hand. "If you only knew how glad I am to see you!" Now he knew how lonely he had been since his mother's letter, seeing her standing there, in her hand a bowl the color of her eyes. "I was worried about you—not knowing where you were. And today a man came with a message from your brother—" He felt her hand collapsing in his, slowly chilling in his palm.

"Oh!" she said. "What—what—" Her face grew fragile, its material paling to porcelain. Her eyes fastened to him in apprehension, pleading and dark with fear.

"That's all right, Agnes. Don't worry. He's—he's all right, I guess. He just wants some things, the man said."

She drew a deep breath and turned away, leaning against the edge of the table. "It's terrible, isn't

it?" she said in a low voice. "I'm trying all the day not to be thinking about it. Specially since—I've known you, Mr. Doan."

He could think of nothing to say and remained silent at her side, pressing her hand and seeing the tears that were pushing out from her closed eyelids.

"He's always been in trouble ever since he was a kid. Mother used to——"

"Don't talk about it." He patted her arm. "I understand so don't explain anything." He moved away and stood by the old stove. "If you go on like that you won't be able to get any dinner for us. And I'm very hungry. What are we going to have, Agnes? I say, I'll just run upstairs and wash and when I come down I want to smell something cooking."

He closed the door and raced upstairs. Whistling through his teeth, he stripped. He bathed in cold water and put on fresh linen. He shaved before the wavering glass and chose a tie for the first time in weeks. How different the house seemed with someone in it, its smallness now pleasant and assuring.

When he came down Agnes was hurrying about the kitchen and the air smelled of cooking butter. She smiled at him wanly and seeing his wet hair and fresh white shirt, stopped in the center of the room.

"Oh! You look the way you used to."

He sat down at the table. "Do you mind?"

She recovered her small smile and went to the stove. "No. Only I'll be expecting Mr. Lyman and Mrs. Swift to come in next."

They ate quickly. He knew she was always uncomfortable with him at table, holding her knife and fork as a child might in her large awkward hands, her eyes seeming to review her past life, dolorous and far. They washed the dishes mechanically, scarcely speaking. Afterward they went out to sit on the porch.

The moon had taken its place in the evening sky, the earth's sole satellite, weak and faithful. It distributed its pallor over the house, the fields, and touched the road faintly, without ardor. It shone as if shining were a task like a Christian woman's duty and hung above the trees with a martyr's meek face. Timothy looked up at it as if he were receiving a gaze. He felt the slight greenish light pouring into him through his eyes. It made him a bit giddy to have his head so filled with light while the spaces about him were dimmed by evening, seeming now a fanciful world in which he would have to search to find his way. It was pleasant to be confused like this in a part of his mind. Soon enough Eddie would be driving back and he would have to think of bushels and quarts and dollars from deliveries.

Agnes stirred in her chair beside him. "It's—it's pretty, isn't it?"

He dragged his eyes from the moon and looked at her. Like the moon her face made a luminous

disk on the night, its stolen radiance turned on him. He shivered, his eyes closing. She was near him, waiting. They were both waiting, like two children left alone. His hand went slowly out from his knees. It touched hers, lying tense on her black skirt. Their fingers curled together and lay quiet, frightened and trembling.

A man was coming slowly toward the gate. He stopped to examine the house, staring through the moonlight. He opened the gate and started up the path. Timothy drew away his hand and stood. He walked to the steps.

"Good evening," said the man. "I'm looking for Mr. Timothy Doan." His coarse voice wounded the evening and his square shoulders and heavy dark hat seemed ominous and predatory in the gentle current of the night.

"I'm Timothy Doan."

"I see," said the man. "Well, that's all right, then." He buttoned his coat and walked back to the gate.

"What do you want?" called Timothy.

The gate clicked. The man hurried up the road and Timothy saw his stout dark form striding around the bend. He stared after him and presently heard the rhythm of a running engine. It grew fainter and the night was emptied of all sound except the industrious plaint of insects.

Timothy turned back and sat down in his chair. "I can't think why anyone should——"

"It's your wife," Agnes said in a choked voice.

Timothy laughed with dry bitterness. "No. She doesn't want to know where I am. She could have written."

Agnes repeated in simple conviction, "It's your wife."

"But why? I would have gone to her at the first sign. She knew she had only to ask. But no letter ——"

"A letter isn't the same thing as knowing where a person is. Hannah always says she don't know when people call up the house. Oh, it's your wife, all right."

"It isn't, Agnes. And I don't care what it is."

He folded his arms and stared out at the faint trail that led past the house. The night had no more mystery to give. The moon was a commonplace natural object, often to be seen in the sky. Agnes would have to be going soon to get her train. He drew out his watch. Past eleven. Where was Eddie and the car? Now he remembered that he had shouted out something as he drove away to make the deliveries—words that had drifted over the grass, scattering in the wind, disturbing his thoughts. He glanced at Agnes, thinking he was glad the man had come along. He shouldn't have taken her hand. He felt cold now and ashamed, uneasy under her fixed frightened eyes.

The moon had slid to the next tree top and watched over the sleep of the gardens. The tree

frogs, katydids, and crickets were singing in a frantic chorus, excited by the night. Listening, he stirred restlessly. A nervous impalpable current, dark and alarming, flowed from Agnes to him, like a reproachful summons, a caressing plea. He folded his arms again, trembling. He wanted to draw her to him, to kiss her. He felt that if he yielded it would be wrong and cheap. No, he couldn't. Frowning at the fence, he sat on in silence. Presently he saw the moon had moved to another place.

She arose from her chair. "I'll have to be going for my train."

"But, Agnes—the car. It isn't here. Eddie took it. I don't know——"

They gazed at each other in the faint light. Her face was small and dismayed. Her hands were wandering over her black dress as they had moved that day in Hannah's kitchen.

"Have I time to walk?"

"No."

"What—what will I do?"

"I don't know. Unless——"

She waited for him to go on. She made a slight movement and stiffened against her chair. Her eyes wavered and fell. "Have you—if you had an extra room——"

He nodded. "I guess you'll have to stay, Agnes." He tried to make his voice matter of fact, like the began to hum again as he walked along to his room. "Do you want to go up now?"

She didn't answer and he opened the door and turned on the lights. He hummed loudly as he went up the stairs before her. "In here, Agnes. I'm afraid you won't be very comfortable."

She followed him silently and passed into the little room at the top of the stairs. "Thank you, Mr. Doan."

"That's all right, Agnes. Anything you want? Well, good night." He closed the door quickly and began to hum again as he walked along to his room. He undressed and jumped into bed. Through his window the intruders of the night followed him—the moon and the frenzied song of insects. Were they courting? He pulled up the sheet over his head and noticed that his hands were still trembling.

XX

"Have we got enough?"

Timothy glanced into the basket. "No. Better fill it up. Agnes said she'd cook some for dinner tonight. Think we can spare them from the orders?"

"I guess so." Eddie threw up his head and gave Timothy a stare of frank curiosity. "Say. How long is she going to stay?"

Timothy bent back to the row and began to pull off the tender green pods. They creaked like silk between his fingers. "I don't know."

Eddie moved away. "The folks was asking me last night who she was."

"She's a friend of mine," said Timothy shortly.

They worked in silence. A bumble bee hesitated over their heads, poised itself and flew away to the bean blossoms. When the basket was filled Timothy lifted it to Eddie's shoulder.

He looked at the sun. An hour till luncheon. He went to fetch a hoe. A stifling heat rose in quivering waves. The shell of the earth seemed to resist him as he broke it, unwilling to reveal to the sun its sensitive under skin. He felt a hot content as he worked, no longer moving about his tasks like

an automaton. All his dull bitterness seemed to be buried under the minute wounds he had made in these fields. It would enrich them, perhaps, like the fertilizer that urged them to their harvest. He thought of Agnes in the kitchen, preparing his food, glancing at the clock, caring for each moment that passed because it brought her nearer that one in which he would open the door and announce his hunger. He thought of her sewing on the porch in the afternoons in sight of the gardens, a patch of white on her knees, eager that all his rents be mended and each button set firmly on its place. And the hose and gardens, his shirts and even himself seemed to have been lifted into affluent importance because they meant so much to Agnes. She by her devotion to him had held up the commonplaces of his life into a kind of glow that penetrated their materials and made them precious. When Eddie had asked, "How long is she going to stay?" he had felt the touch of terror. He had known all along that she must go sometime and refused to allow his alarmed mind to concentrate on his future loneliness. The house without Agnes—Eddie gone at six o'clock—his lamp, his books, his memories whispering in a quiet room— No, Agnes must not go. His fingers tightened about the hoe. He remembered that the night before she had scarcely spoken as they sat together on the porch. Had she been planning to go back to the city and leave him to his sweating days and silent evenings? As they had

entered the house he had brushed against her and she had drawn away with a swift movement of her body, passing in quickly before him and going up the stairs without a word. He dropped the hoe and walked toward the house. That was it. She was going away and trying to find courage to tell him. With distressed eyes he stood in the door and searched her face. Should he ask her?

"Agnes——"

"Yes. I'll have it ready in just a minute now."

He washed at the sink. The cold water burned his face and arms. He dried them and sat down at the table, his eyes trailing her as she moved about.

"Agnes—please call me Timothy. I—I'd like it if you would."

She brought a platter to the table and set it by his plate, her eyes avoiding his gaze. She filled his glass with water. Her thin white throat was above his eyes and he saw the pulse in her neck jumping under the skin as if it wished release from its perpetual imprisonment.

"Agnes, are you angry with me about anything?"

"No. Why should I be?" She turned away.

She's afraid to tell me she wants to go, he thought. If I ask her she'd say no and one day when I come in from work she won't be here. He waited until she sat down, facing him across the table with thin tinted lids lowered over her eyes.

"Tired, Agnes?"

She shook her head without looking up. "No."

"You mustn't get worn out. You do too much, I think."

"Not as much as you do."

He lifted his fork and held it over his plate, watched her face for the signs that would answer his question more truthfully perhaps than her words. "I thought I might fix up the kitchen next month. Put up some new shelves—paint it yellow, maybe. I was wondering if you would help me."

She looked at him at last with slow consenting eyes, clear of secrecy. "Of course."

His breath rushed out in passionate relief. He broke his bread and stuffed a great piece into his mouth. Whatever was in her mind that she was guarding from him could wait until she wished to share it. It couldn't change the content of his life. All he cared for now as he ate his luncheon with the hunger of relief was that she didn't mean to leave him. At least not yet.

XXI

He was working at the far end of the field that afternoon when she called him from the porch, waving her apron. "Telephone!" Her voice was like a thin wail that shepherds send from hilltops. He stumbled over the broken ground to the house, rubbing his palms on his thighs. Hannah, of course. No one else ever telephoned him. Her voice, a distant mumble at first, carried to him an uneasy warning.

"Speak closer to the telephone, Hannah."

"Yes, they're back," she said in continuation.

"Who, Hannah? Who's back?"

"Your father and mother."

"Back from Paris?"

"They came this morning. I didn't get a chance till now——"

"But why? Why did they come back so soon?"

"I don't know. Something about the coffee, your father said."

His heart was running. "Hannah—don't tell them where I am."

"I didn't. But they know." She paused. "Say —they're coming over there after you."

"Hannah!"

"And Mrs. Swift's with them. They just left in the car."

He dropped the receiver, his heart in a panic. "Agnes! Agnes!"

She came running from the kitchen. "What—what——"

"My father—" He saw her face dimly in the shadows of the hall. It floated toward him, the large eyes like burning liquid. He hadn't meant to frighten her. "It's nothing, Agnes. They're coming out to see me, that's all."

"Oh!" She drooped against the wall. Her head fell but her consumed eyes were fixed on him in an agony of appeal. "They'll take you away! They're going to——"

"No!" He leaped to her side and caught her hands. "They won't. They can't."

She leaned upon his shoulder and the weight of her limp body dragged at his arm. "They will!"

"No. No, Agnes. No."

She moaned and turned her face to him. He saw her eyes for a moment, filled with bright pain. She closed them and her head sank until her face lay against his breast. She sighed and seemed to rest. He felt his heart striking her cheek. Slowly he lifted his arms and enclosed her with them. He breathed through the lifting masses of her black hair, moist and warm, pressing his mouth to them and, as if they were a silken fabric, drawing his lips

over them until he touched her forehead. This embrace, so long and timidly desired, seemed like the climax of a dream of struggle, an accomplishment in the air with the solid ground miles below and hidden under clouds.

"They can't make me go away, Agnes. This place is mine. Will you—will you stay here with me?"

She flung up her hands and clutched his shoulders. "I want to. But how can I? You'd never love me—the way I'm loving you."

He said solemnly, "Yes. I think I love you, Agnes. That's what I've been feeling all the time. But I wasn't sure."

Her mouth twisted and she began to cry. "You only love her—you think about her all the time—while we're sitting together——"

His arms dropped down and he stood before her, his head turned away. "I'll never love anyone as much as I loved her. It's no use pretending I can, Agnes."

She nodded, her face drawn and quick with small trembling motions. "No—I wouldn't expect you could."

"But I love you, Agnes. I don't know what I'd do if you went away. I knew it this morning. I was going to tell you——"

She raised her arms toward him and he embraced her. They kissed in passionate simplicity and he saw her fainting face under his. "I think you'd

better go up to your room—so you won't hear the row. It would only upset you. I'll go out—and wait for them."

He led her to the stairs, his arms about her in a yearning of protection. He kissed her again and watched her strong thin body moving slowly up from step to step. She turned at the top to look down at him and a wavering smile passed over her face.

"Don't worry, Agnes. Everything will be all right."

She gazed at him, then turned away, down the upper hall.

He went out on the porch and straightened the chairs. Should he work till they came? It would prepare him, perhaps. He went down the steps, looking from side to side to see if everything was in order. He picked up a dead branch and carried it to the road, glancing toward the bend. They wouldn't be long arriving. He had better stay by the front of the house so they wouldn't go inside looking for him. They mustn't see Agnes. No matter what happened he must save her from his family and Mrs. Swift. They mustn't know she had been living there with him. They would never believe——

His hands were like melting ice. He dried the palms and held them out. What would his mother think of his hands, hard as bark, burned to the color of leather, the nails stained with earth and the

juice of his plants? And he, once immaculate as to his linen and unreproachful as to his ties, would stand dressed like a laborer—the farmer he had become—before his mother, fresh from her neat sartorial rites. He set his shoulders and teeth. Let them stay away from me if they can't stand the way I look. They can do without me and God knows I can do without them.

The car was coming. He heard its slight whirr beyond the bend like a partridge in flight. He went to the fence and waited. As he saw the great vehicle take the turn, he sprang into calm as if he had leaped upon a rock. He wanted to laugh and stretch his arms. He wondered why he had been afraid. He was safe—secure on his own land. They could do him no harm with their words.

He leaned on the gate and watched the car slowing down. A man he had never seen was sitting with the chauffeur. His shoulders were stocky and he wore a heavy felt hat. His coarse face stared through the windshield at the little brown house. Timothy remembered. The man in the moonlight who asked his name. A detective sent to spy him out. Mrs. Swift hunting evidence.

The car stopped. His mother saw him and spoke to his father. "There he is." They all stared at him and repeated, "There he is."

"Yes, I'm here." Timothy opened the gate and went to the side of the motor. Three stiff faces watched over his steps. He felt young and strong,

brave and defiant, as he returned their stares. And coming into his consciousness was a sense of pity. He could hurt them, make a difference to them. They could do nothing to him now. Whatever advantage there would be in the coming clash would be held by him.

Mr. Doan's head was hunched forward between his teeth, clenched like a bulldog's. He looked older, Timothy thought. The past months had drained him and the residue of his years was bitter. He moved forward in his seat, clearing his throat.

"Well, you must know what we think of you, Timothy. Have you anything to say?"

"I haven't done anything wrong, Father."

Mr. Doan's face began to swell. The congestion pushed out his cheeks and opened his mouth. "You've disgraced your family! You've run away to live with a servant!"

His mother's head drooped toward her shoulder. She wept weakly, her face white and humiliated. "Oh, Timmy! I've been quite ill with the shame you've brought on us. How could a son of mine ——"

He was moved by her pain. He wanted to go take her hand and explain himself, to lessen her grief by showing her the truth. But his father's face, watching him for a sign of his old weakness, gave him no time. He felt as if he were standing before a lifted revolver from which he must defend himself. He straightened his back.

"I'm not living with Agnes. Not what you mean."

"Very likely," said Mrs. Swift. Her spiteful eyes pierced him. She turned to his father. "We have all the evidence we need, I should think."

"I don't expect you to believe me," said Timothy. "I don't care what you believe. I only want to be left alone."

Mr. Doan lifted a shaking finger. "I'd like nothing better than to wash my hands of you for all time. But it happens you're my son. If I let you alone you'll end up in the gutter. Or worse," he ended dramatically.

"I'm going to end right here where you see me beginning," said Timothy. "I'm sorry I've hurt mother. I don't care about you. After all, there's no disgrace in being a farmer." He stopped and gazed at his father clearly. "There have been farmers in our family—in all families, pretty nearly. Grandfather's father out west—grandmother's father—" He broke off to flash a look at Mrs. Swift. "Hers, too—but she'd never admit it."

"*Really,* Timothy," said Mrs. Swift, "I would thank you to confine——"

"That's not the point!" shouted Mr. Doan. "Your grandfather and I have made the family something better than that. And I'll not allow a son of mine to pull us down again. You're crazier than I thought if you believe I'll allow you to stay

out here looking like a workman and living with a low-class girl."

"Agnes is just as good as I am," said Timothy hotly. "She's just about what we were before grandfather made his money—good farmer stock."

Mrs. Swift's poisoned eyes found his. "Since you are so infatuated with this—this servant girl," she said, "why don't you marry her?"

"Why not?" cried Timothy in a loud voice. "She'll stick with me. She won't break my heart—like Erna." He threw out his arm at the car. "Go away, all of you! I don't want to see any of you again!"

"I won't go away!" His father's inflamed face hung over the edge of the car, blazing and busy in all its smaller muscles. "You're not going to disgrace us all while I'm alive to stop you!"

Timothy looked at him and folded his arms. "What are you going to do about it?" His voice was hoarse but the knowledge that he would win pulled down his temper like a flag on a cord. "This is my property. Where I got it is none of your business. But you can't force me off. I'm twenty-one and free from you."

His mother's sobs entered his ears, panting through the air that was quiet after he had spoken. His arms dropped and he took a step forward. Her grief jerked at his heart. He felt his lips growing unsteady and bit them. "I'm sorry, Mother. But

you've still got May. Nothing I could ever do would make you and me happy at the same time. I had to choose and I chose this. I'm going to stay here."

There was a long pause. His eyes, distressed and determined, passed over the three seated above him. His mother's face was in her hands. Tears were running over her beautiful light gloves and above the embroidered gauntlets he saw her delicate pale flesh, white with grief. As he gazed at her he knew he would always suffer, remembering this moment. That as long as he lived he would see her aloof fragile face, vague and passionless, bent in sorrow for his ways.

Mrs. Swift lifted her pointed chin from her scarf. "This is the end, then, Timothy? Let's be perfectly clear about it. You've deserted your wife for a servant. God knows when it began—in my house, I suppose."

"That's a lie!" Timothy lifted his hand, doubled, and shook it at her. "There was never anyone but Erna and you know it! If she hadn't refused to come with me——"

"She could have been living here—with the farm work to do, I suppose."

"We would have had each other. It would have been enough if she'd loved me. We might have been happy if you'd only left us alone."

Mr. Doan lifted his heavy face, pale now, lined and sagging. "These are all useless insults. We're

wasting our time talking to you. You're crazy. You're selfish. You don't care what the rest of us suffer as long as you get your way. You've had every advantage money could——"

Timothy interrupted him with a loud laugh. "Money! Yes, and everything you wanted me to have whether I wanted it or not. That's your idea of advantages, Father. Only one thing you couldn't give me—your ideas. You've been such a tyrant that I never dared do what I wanted until now. And even now I've got to fight for it. My God, let me alone, let me alone!"

"Certainly," said Mr. Doan. He raised his glove and tapped on the glass. The chauffeur turned his head and received an apoplectic gesture.

Mrs. Doan let her stained gloves fall and opened her scarred eyes on Timothy. Her lips moved. "Oh, Timmy, I——"

Her husband turned upon her savagely and pinched her into silence. The car started away.

Timothy gazed after its broad beige stern. He shouted, "Tell Erna— tell Erna——"

The dust of the road rose in white whirlings about the departing motor like a filmy waterspout. The particles grew quiet and when their motion had ceased, caught the sun and, poising in the yellow air, made a chrome curtain that spread wide, hiding the length of the road before him. He could see nothing.

He went back and leaned weakly on the gate.

What had he wanted them to say to Erna? He shook his head. He didn't know. Slowly he turned toward the house. Agnes would be waiting for him, looking out in terror from her window upstairs. He closed the gate behind him and went up the path.

FINIS

PS 3537
O3 H3
1925